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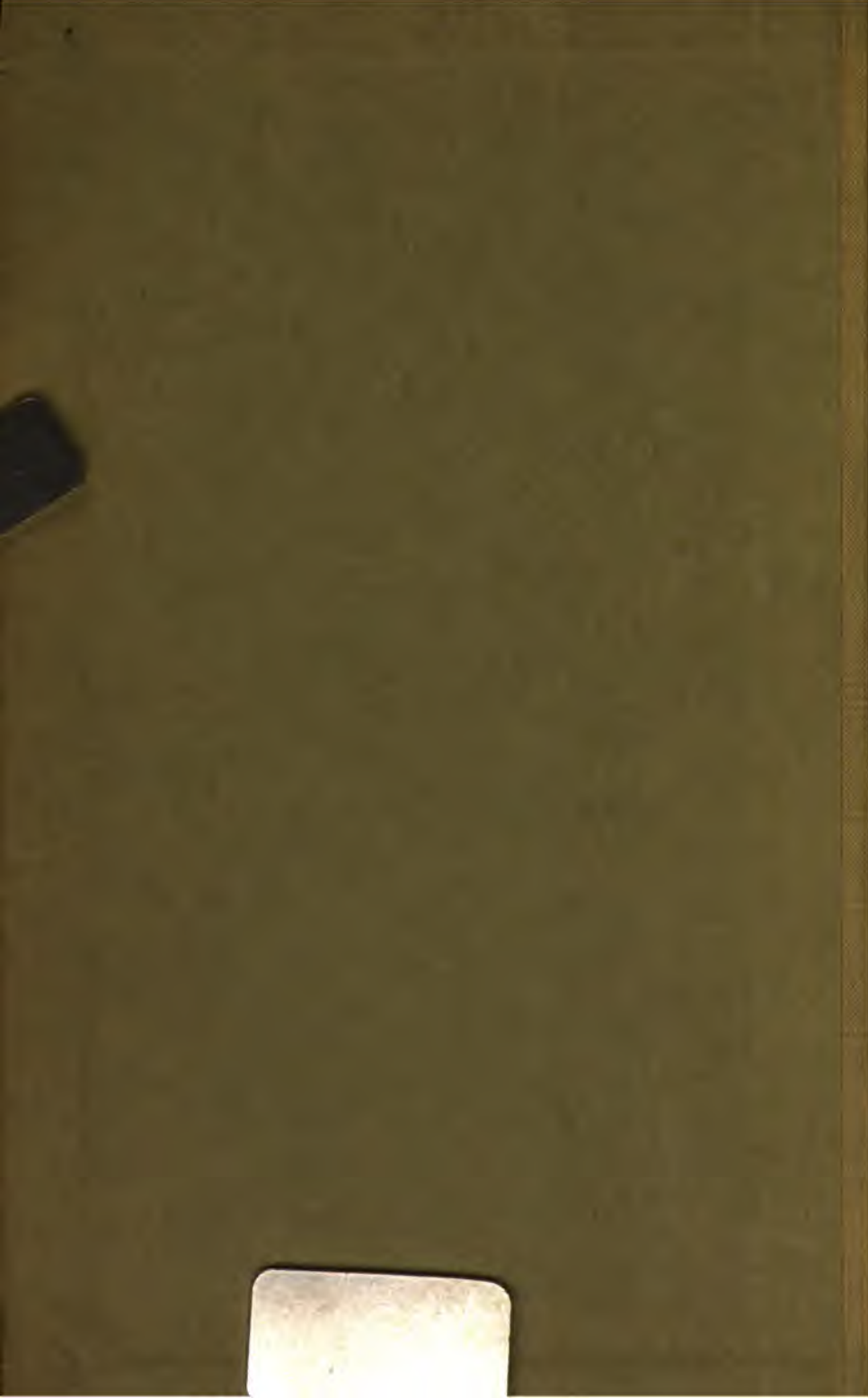
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LOUISE DE LA VALLIÈRE

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La Duchesse de La Vallière.

Picture by G. Le N. in the collection of M. Edmond Le Berquier.

LA MUSE DE LA VALLIÈRE

AND

THE EARLY LIFE OF LOUIS XIV

SELECTED AND TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH EDITION

By

JULES LAIR

Member of the Institut

ADAPTED FROM THE FRENCH EDITION

By

HORACE COLDEN MAYNE

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

NEW YORK: G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS

and 29 West Twenty Third Street

1903



La Vierge de La Vallée

Donnée par M. de la Vallée à la bibliothèque de la Vallée

LOUISE DE LA VALLIÈRE
AND
THE EARLY LIFE OF LOUIS XIV

FROM UNPUBLISHED DOCUMENTS

By
JULES LAIR
Member of The Institute

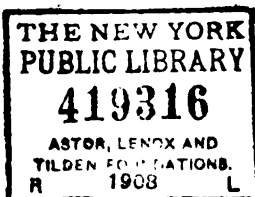
TRANSLATED FROM THE FOURTH FRENCH EDITION

By
ETHEL COLBURN MAYNE

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

New York: G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS
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FOREWORD

THIS history—or, to use a less pretentious word, this memoir—was begun in the little Château of Bures, in the heart of the Chevreuse Valley. There I found—conscientiously copied—the letters of Louise de La Vallière to the Maréchal de Bellefonds, letters till then known only in a grandiloquent kind of adaptation. The house was peculiarly fitted to evoke the memory of that gracious, tender woman, whose disinterestedness and modesty threw a veil over her only error—one which the world forgave her, but which she chose to expiate by a penance of more than forty years' duration. . . In that house, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, lived a lady of the race of Bragelongne. In that house there died, a year ago, a good and noble woman who remembered being told, as a little child, by her grandmother, then aged eighty, of a Dowager-Princess of Conti having held her on her knees. "Ah, my children!" the old lady had said (she was a Wavrin Villers-au-Tertre), "if you could have seen, if you could have known!" And, as a sort of commentary to these wonderful tales, were to be seen then—are, indeed, to be seen now—ten or twelve pictures representing personages of the *Grand Siècle*: a Princess dressed as Diana; a Magdalen, whose conventual habit is very evidently painted over the splendid fripperies of a Court-dress; and, last but not least, a Carmelite nun. To find, in such a

v

place, La Vallière's letters ! It was inevitable that one should evoke again, study again, that most sympathetic personality.

This study has occupied the leisure-hours of six years. No one would guess that to look at it, yet it is so. I must add, however, that the leisure-hours have been few. For those six years, I cherished the design of dedicating this volume to the Châtelaine of Bures, that Mme la Comtesse Adrienne de Wavrin, who seemed not so much a contemporary of one's own as the granddaughter of a contemporary of Louise de La Vallière. At once very proud and very simple, very amiable and very melancholy, as hostile to modernity as she was interested in the past, heroic on her bed of suffering as were her ancestors on the field of battle, Mme de Wavrin was the true daughter of a great race. I had hoped to offer her these pages. She would have read them—at the worst, out of kindness. But I shall not have that pleasure, and she will not have that trouble. Nevertheless, I should feel myself wanting in gratitude, I should even feel that I was taking from my book its one little chance of success, if I omitted to speak here of all it owes to that last descendant of a noble line. 'Tis but the homage of a day—I shall have no satisfaction but the heartfelt pleasure of having rendered it. . . I owed it, and I now render it, to the memory of Mme la Comtesse de Wavrin Villers-au-Tertre.

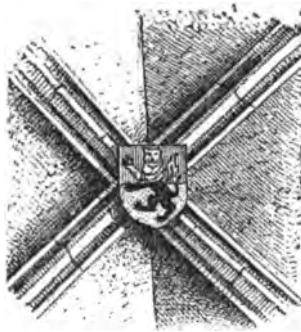
BURES,

September 28, 1880.

It would be unbecoming to seem to dedicate twice so modest a volume, but may I record here that it was Monsieur Brunetière who first drew public attention, with all the authority and indulgence of a master,

to this work of an unknown writer? I desire to acknowledge now all that I owe to that eminent critic, so prematurely lost to his friends and to literature. I desire at the same time to salute respectfully the brave defender of those principles without which a people can never flourish—love of country, and faith in God.

I have added to this edition several reproductions of pictures, portraits, views, and plans which conduce to the better knowledge of Louise de La Vallière and her time. These documents have been for the most part until now unpublished, or little known. It is an agreeable duty for me to thank here my *confrère*, Monsieur A. Froment, archivist and paleographer, who has accorded me an active and intelligent co-operation in this matter.



THE ARMS OF LE BLANC

**The keystone in the ancient chapel of La Baume, at Veudra. (See p. 5.)
By the courtesy of M. Eugène Le Brun.**

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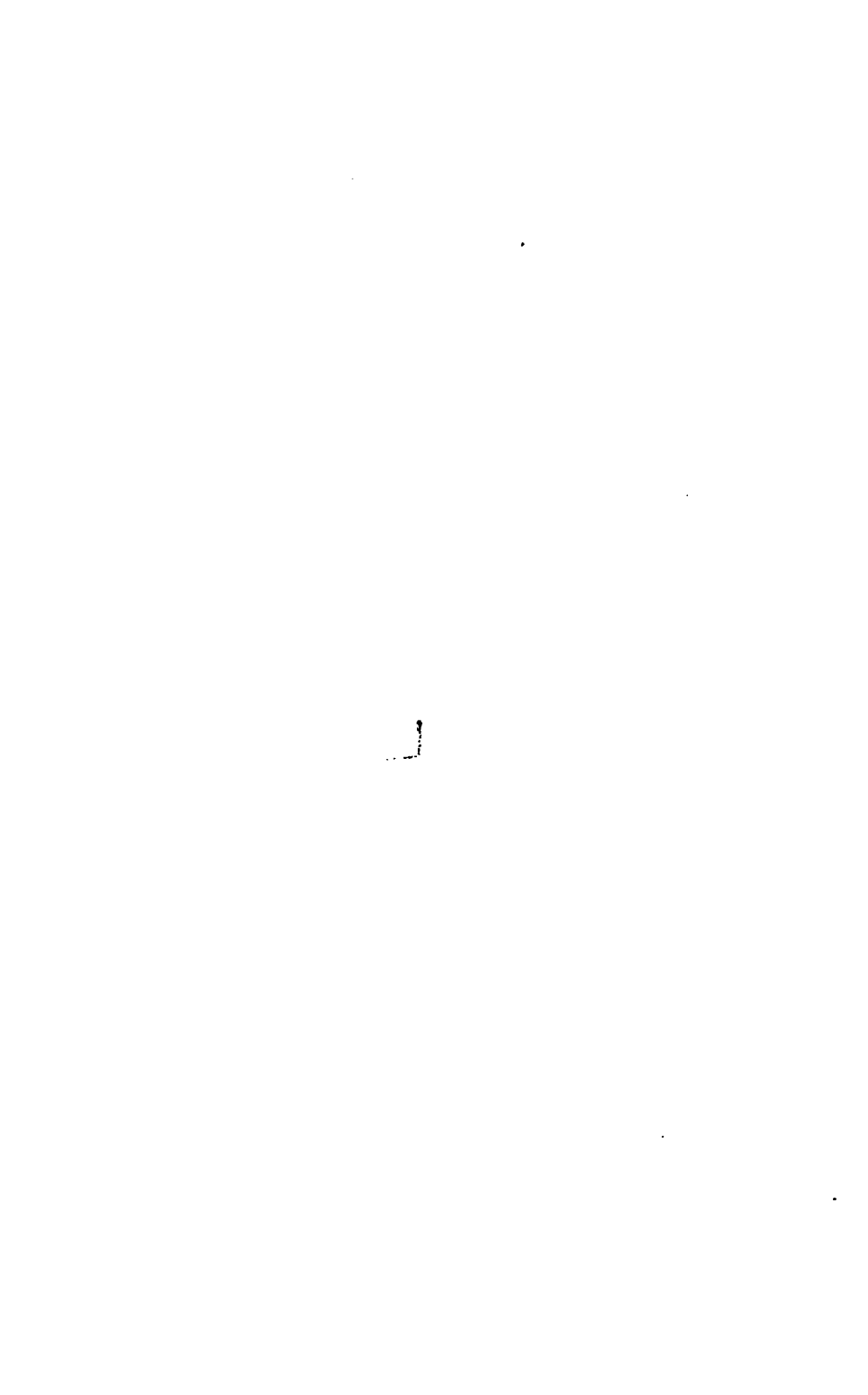
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thousand francs in modern money. Laurent died, in a ripe old age, at Tours, but by his own request he was buried in his beloved church at Reugny. His son, Jean Le Blanc, entrenched the La Vallière homestead, and provided it with drawbridges (May 13, 1579). He was then *maître d'hôtel* to Catherine de Médicis; and his wife, Charlotte Adam, was made her lady-in-waiting. He was Mayor of Tours in 1588, and honoured by the confidence of Henri III. and Henri IV. He made a fortune, and died about 1615.

His grand-nephew, Jean, *sieur de la Gasserie*, Equerry-in-Ordinary of the *petite écurie du roi*, Gendarme of Monseigneur le Dauphin's Company, married Françoise de Beauvau, the daughter of Jacques de Beauvau du Rivau, Knight of the Order of the King, Gentleman-in-Ordinary of the Royal Household, and of *dame* Françoise le Picart. This latter remarried, in later years, Jacques de l'Hôpital, Comte de Choisy, Captain of the Fifty Men-at-Arms of King Henri IV. Of this new union was born the celebrated Madame de Choisy, who will have a part to play in our narrative, since she was the means of introducing Louise de La Vallière to Court.

Jean did well for his descendants in ensuring for them the possession of the name of La Baume Le Blanc, which was accorded him, though the La Baume estate had passed into other hands. He also arranged that the arms of his ancestors should be retained "on the keystone of their ancient chapel in the church of Veurdre, so as to preserve *in perpetuo* the knowledge of the origin and extraction of the said family of Le Blanc."¹

The military traditions left by Perrin had long since been revived by many members of the family.

¹ M. Le Brun has published, and has permitted us to reproduce, a photograph of this keystone, as well as several other views of the old Castle of the La Baume Le Blancs, which now belongs to him. We desire to thank him publicly for his great courtesy.

Gaillard Le Blanc, after having distinguished himself on the battle-fields of Marignan and Pavia, had met his death at the battle of Sainte-Brigide. The grand-uncle of our Louise, Laurent Le Blanc, is said to have died at the Siege of Ostend, on March 15, 1602. Of her uncles, three had lost, or were to lose, their lives in the service of their country. One, Charles, died at the Siege of Spire; the second, Louis, at that of Damvilliers; the third, François, was killed before Lérída, in 1647.

The father of Louise showed himself worthy of these glorious traditions. At the Passage of Brai, in the campaign of 1634, he had borne alone the brunt of the enemy's attack, and covered and assured the retreat of the army. On May 20, 1635, the day of Avein, he broke through the ranks of the Spanish general, Lamboi. The year before his daughter's birth, Laurent distinguished himself at Rocroi. Already the father of a two-year-old son, he came, at the end of this successful campaign, to enjoy a period of rest at Touraine; and it was in the month of August of the following year (1644) that Louise was born.

Heroes rarely make their fortunes, and at this time the demesne of La Vallière, so far from increasing, was diminishing day by day. Any one who had then been inclined to guess at the future of the little girl, would have imagined her, sixteen or eighteen years thence, "taking the vows," or else marrying some officer of light-horse—especially as Laurent, renouncing the active life of the camp, and now appointed Lieutenant of the Amboise district, had turned into a veritable country-gentleman. He styled himself Knight, and Lord of La Vallière.¹ He even managed to

¹ Jean de La Baume Le Blanc, *sieur* de la Gasserie, took the title of La Vallière after the death of his elder brother, Laurent. He was Steward-in-ordinary to the King, and Lieutenant of Amboise. He died May 27, 1647.



The old Tower.



Courtyard.

RUINS OF THE OLD CASTLE OF LA BAUME, IN BOURBONNAIS.

3

have the modest demesne elevated into a Marquisate, though the procedure was not completed until after his death. At any rate, his daughter grew from childhood to girlhood partly in the castle at Amboise, where the various styles of architecture, all of them impressive, prepared her imagination for Royal splendours, and partly in the manor of La Vallière—small, but very pleasant, and eminently sympathetic to the dreams of youth.

The habitation of the La Baume Le Blancs is situated on a little hill between the valley—*la vallière*, whence it takes its name—and the comparatively extensive Vale of Brenne. There, in former days, had stood a feudal castle, with ditches, moat, and dungeon. All that remained of that warlike construction were some walls and a crenellated gate, flanked by two towers—within which, nevertheless, a charming pavilion, exquisitely ornamented, had been built, probably by some architect accepting a holiday-task after the great works at Chambord or at Blois. There is an enchanting view from the windows of the manor-house. Verdant meadows lie at the foot of the gentle slope, and there, between tall poplars, runs the little river whose waters turn the wheel of the inevitable mill. A little farther on, on the flank of the other hill, is the village of Reugny, with its sharp-steeped church. To the left lies the manor of La Côte, another La Baume Le Blanc abode, and the whole fair picture is framed in vineyards, copses, and clumps of secular oak-trees. Nature all around seems smiling—and smiling her most captivating smile, as if she wanted to keep always near her those fortunate beings over whose birth she had presided.

One feels that the La Vallières loved this little

territory ; they certainly loved their home, and devoted themselves to its interior embellishment. Two mantelpieces still exist, covered with most interesting paintings. Little Louise had quaint pictures wherewith to amuse her youthful curiosity. One of these mantelpieces—that on the ground-floor—represents this very valley of Reugny, the church, the winding river, with the Castle on the right. In the centre are peasants, some of whom are dancing in a ring, while others are walking about. 'Tis the Parish-Feast—a scene of rural glee.

The sides of the mantelpiece are decorated by four allegorical figures, three women and a man. The man is in late sixteenth-century costume, and bears the legend *Cineres mediteris et urnam*. The woman, on the opposite side, has near her a little Love, and this inscription: *Sit tibi surda Venus*.¹

The mantelpiece on the first floor has a different subject. It is an open-air scene in the little Court of a provincial nobleman. On the left is the master of the house ; near him are his wife and another female figure ; on the right, groups of female dependants—peasant-women and chamber-maids. In the midst of these, a young girl stands holding a dog, in what the description calls “a coquettish attitude.” A Cupid, under a tree to the left, appears to be aiming his dart at her through a target. M. l'Abbé Bossebeuf inclines to the belief that the figures are all portraits, the master of the house being Jean Le Blanc, and the lady Charlotte Adam. The young coquette would then be Marie Adam, sister of Charlotte, whom Laurent Le Blanc, second of the name,

¹ We take this information from a communication made by M. l'Abbé Bossebeuf to the *Bulletin* of the *Société archéologique de Touraine*, (May 22, 1901).

married some years later. Some go so far as to attribute the paintings to François Clouet.¹

Finally—and comparatively recently—there was found at La Vallière, and restored to its proper place, a Latin inscription, also designed for a mantelpiece, and no less worthy of attention than these paintings. *Ad principem ut ad ignem amor indissolubilis* ("For the prince, as for the altar-fire, our love is indissoluble"). What a singular hazard it was which placed this device—as it were for an appeal to her curiosity!—before the gaze of a little girl who was to love a Prince and love him only, until the hour when, repentant of this one weakness, she bound herself to God by vows that were indeed indissoluble!

Louise was still quite a child when, in March 1651, the din of war broke out upon the tranquil banks of the Loire. The King, Louis XIV., his mother, Anne of Austria, and his minister, Mazarin, hunted from Paris by the Fronde, were beginning an offensive return, and advancing upon Amboise and Blois. Louis was then fourteen and a half. Though his majority had been declared on September 7 of the preceding year, he was in reality nothing but a physically well-developed boy, good at athletic exercises, but, on the other hand, very ignorant, indeed almost uneducated. Naturally, he took no part in the direction of affairs, but he already felt the inconvenience and the penury to which these revolts exposed him, and he remembered them to the end of his life.

The apparent head of the Fronde was his uncle Gaston, Duke of Orleans, a prince as ambitious as he was irresolute, and the father of a daughter still more

¹ Madame de Lamotte, the proprietor of the La Vallière demesne, has been kind enough to give us some very useful information, and we are happy to offer her here our warmest thanks. Between the words *amor* and *indissolubilis* is a monogram, probably that of the Le Blancs.

ambitious than himself, and of very determined character. Mademoiselle d'Orléans desired to be Queen of France—to marry, despite her twenty-five years, this King of fourteen and a half! Despairing of success by peaceful methods, she resolved to put the pistol to his head. Finding the men of her party too lukewarm for her taste, and desirous of keeping the Court and Mazarin out of Paris, she went into the field herself, and attempted to capture Amboise, which would have given her an excellent position on the left bank of the Loire. But M. de Sourdis, Governor of the Orleans district, lent but a listless ear to her propositions, and Laurent de La Vallière, Sourdis' Lieutenant, guarded the place so well that he kept it for the lawful Prince—that Prince, who, later on . . . But later on, the honest soldier was dead.¹

Laurent died, in fact, in the course of the summer of 1651.² His widow, Françoise Le Provost, daughter of Jean, Lord of La Coutelaye, Equerry of the *grande écurie du roi*, and of Elizabeth Martin de Mauroi,³ had married, as her first husband, Besnard, Lord of Rezay,⁴ Member of the Parliament. She was thus tolerably well off, and according to her contract (November 20,

¹ 1649. "The town of Amboise will take defensive measures. All the gates of the town will be guarded." By order. Laurent de La Baulme Le Blanc, Lieutenant of the King.—1651. February 2. Assembly of the citizens of Amboise, under the presidency of Laurent Le Blanc, Knight, Lord of La Vallière.—1652. Letters of Louis XIV., given at Blois, March 22, warning the citizens of Amboise that the enemy is desirous of seizing the fords of the Loire. M. l'Abbé CHEVALIER. *Inventaire analytique des archives municipales d'Amboise*, pp. 108, 9, 10. Cf. Mlle. DE MONTPENSIER, *Mémoires*, II. 275.

² We were mistaken, in preceding editions, in assigning Laurent's death to the year 1654. An authentic document—an inventory drawn up in September, 1651—shows that Laurent was dead at that period; and as he was at Amboise on February 2, 1651, his death must have taken place between the March and the September of that year.

³ SAINT-ALLAIS, *Nobiliaire universel*, v. XIII. p. 179, gives, erroneously, "de Maudroy."

⁴ Parish of Chemillé-sur-Indraie, district of Montrésor, *arrondissement* of Loches,

1640) she had brought to Laurent de La Vallière a capital of 60,562 *livres* (almost 15,000 francs a year in modern money), besides certain personal property.

Thoroughly acquainted as she was with his affairs, she did not take long to realise that her second husband had left more glory than money behind him. Her first step, therefore, was to reclaim her personal estate. To her 60,000 *livres* were added a jointure of 6,000 *livres*, besides her personal property, and 2,000 *livres* for her mourning and that of her household, for her carriage, and for her installation at La Vallière. She would be obliged to relinquish, in taking this step, the guardianship of her children; but she was not thinking of their interests. The fact was that she still felt herself a young woman, and was contemplating a third marriage.

On September 23, 1651, she appeared before Georges Catinat, Privy Councillor and Lieutenant-General of Touraine, and declared that, for the preservation of her matrimonial rights, she desired to renounce her joint proprietorship with her late husband, and also the guardianship of her children.¹ A family-council instantly assembled, composed of Pierre de La Baume Le Blanc, Esquire, Lord of La Roche, formerly Privy Councillor, President of the Bench at Tours, and Louise's godfather, and of Julien Chalopin, Esquire, of La Boidrie, Privy Councillor, and Comptroller-General of Finance, in the *généralité* of Tours. These were the grand-uncles of the two minors, Jean-François and Louise-Françoise de La Baume Le Blanc. They

¹ This valuable document, belonging to the Record Office at Tours, has been generously communicated to us by our learned *confrère*, Monsieur J. LEMOINE, the author of a book as interesting as it is well-documented: *De La Vallière à Montespan*, published by Calmann-Lévy. We are anxious to express here our warm acknowledgment of his kindness.

were given as coadjutors André Couldreau, of Planchevin, Treasurer of France, of the *généralité* of Tours, and François Joubert, of La Borde, both neighbours, in default of resident relations. The assembly immediately elected Pierre de La Baume Le Blanc trustee for the inventory and the suits-at-law brought by the mother against her children. The case was opened before Gatien Pommier, Royal Notary at Reugny, assisted by Pierre Chevallier, a master-broker at Tours; and on Monday, the 25th of the same month, was begun the inventory of the personal property left by Laurent.

A summary of this curious document will give an idea of what Reugny then was—a little castle, or rather a small country-seat, where, amongst various ancient splendours, were included a quantity of things which had been worn out in the service of three or four generations. We find therein descriptions of the rooms of the dead man, his wife, their son François, and their daughter Louise. It is an interesting side-light upon the life of the smaller nobility at that period.

On the ground-floor, in the first almost empty room, we notice "a backgammon-board and pieces," valued at 12 *livres*, and a tapestry-hanging, 30 *livres*. In the next room, described as "a large reception-room," is a walnut-wood expanding-table, 60 *sous*; a bed with draped tester, quoted at 150 *livres*; two curtains in red camlet, "hanging in the windows"; six chairs, six folding-chairs, two arm-chairs, all in walnut-wood with covers of crimson *gros de Naples*, 120 *livres*. "As decoration": a Turkey-carpet, with yellow ground, measuring three ells (*aunes*) and a half, 30 *livres*; another of an ell and a half, 6 *livres*; finally, a tapestry-hanging, consisting of eight pieces of about twenty-four ells, 800 *livres*. A mirror,



Entrance.



Exterior view.

CHÂTEAU DE REUGNY.

12. 1. 1911

framed in black wood, and embellished with silver plates, completed the decorations.

In a room "on the other side of the large reception-room" were two arm-chairs, and six folding-chairs, upholstered in yellow damask (35 *livres*), and a German cabinet in ebony, having two wings, closing with lock and key, 50 *livres*. A large mirror framed in ebony, with its upholding cords, 90 *livres*; two crimson, and two green, velvet cushions, 18 *livres* for the four. Two more were valued at 25 *sous* apiece, and finally came a painting of the Presentation of Saint Joseph, 8 *livres*.

These were the state-apartments.

A passage or corridor, decorated with six oil-paintings, framed in black wood and representing different forms of sport, separated the servants' quarters from the more aristocratic portion of the house; and in the servants' hall were to be seen, together with weapons of various kinds, nine paintings in distemper, representing groups of people, and valued at 40 *sous*.

On the first floor, the high-ceilinged room, looking towards Neuilly,¹ was furnished with a certain degree of luxury. A tapestry-carpet, 15 *livres*; a bed in walnut-wood, with its accessories—a flock-mattress, and two blankets; on this bedstead a scarlet tester, composed of three valances and three curtains, the whole relieved with gold embroideries, and a counterpane in quilted taffeta—valued altogether at 150 *livres*. A second bed, also with a three-valanced and three-curtained tester with head-board, all in crimson and gold *gros de Naples*, relieved with embroideries in white taffeta, was priced at 85 *livres*. Round it stood six folding-chairs with red velvet covers, 30 *livres*; while a

¹ Perhaps Neuillé-le-Lierre, on the Brenne, to the north of La Vallière.

mirror with black wood frame was 8 *livres*. Along the walls was a tapestry-hanging, with design of foliage, eight pieces, measuring twenty-four or twenty-five ells, 600 *livres*. This was evidently the room of the master and mistress of La Vallière.

In the garrets, in a room tucked under the roof, the inventory mentions a wooden table at 30 *sous*, another at 50, and a bed which was valued at 33 *livres* complete. Along the walls, three coffers: one containing the wearing-apparel of the late Laurent's *homme de chambre*; the second, that of Jean Péniceau, tutor to his son Jean-François; and the third, that of Jean-François himself. Such, in its utter simplicity, was the bedroom of the future Marquis de La Vallière!

On the same floor, at the other end of the garrets, was a second room. Round its walls hung a Bergamese tapestry, measuring about sixteen ells; there was a big bed of old oak, valued at 40 *sous*; bolster, pillows, crimson flock-mattress, red wool blanket striped with black, valance, three curtains, two head-valances, and a head-board, 15 *livres*. The bed, complete, was worth 25 *livres* 5 *sous*. In the same room were three little beds priced at 40 *sous* apiece, with their accessories, 12 *livres*; an oak table on two trestles, 10 *sous*; six wooden chairs with straw seats, 20 *sous*; a pair of iron fire-dogs, a sort of little fender, and a pair of tongs, completed the furnishing. As in the preceding room, three trunks stood against the wall. The first, with lock and key, contained some holland chemises, belonging to the widow. The second and third held also some chemises, besides other linen and wearing-apparel. And that was Louise de La Vallière's wardrobe!

This garret, with its big antique bed, was evidently an ancestral chamber, converted into a children's dormitory, where little Louise, then aged seven, slept

with some old nurse, and spent unwittingly the happiest days of her life. Modest as the daughter's wardrobe was, her father's was scarcely more luxurious. Eight holland shirts, quoted at 5 *livres* each ; a cross-belt embroidered in gold and silver, 25 *livres* ; a scarlet cloak with buttons and trimmings of gold and silver, 20 *livres*. In this honest soldier's room, there are some weapons to be described—two swords, priced at 20 and 40 *sous* ; four old pistols, 50 *sous* ; a musket "mounted in the German fashion," 12 *livres* ; a gun à trois pieds, 8 *livres* ; a pair of pistols mounted in silver, some halberds and other arms which might have been used in the time of Francis I. ; a suit of armour, with armlets and cap, 6 *livres*. The whole pile of old clothes belonging to this Lieutenant of the King was not worth 120 *livres*. On the other hand, the library—forty-four folio volumes, and a hundred and ninety-eight quartos and octavos—was estimated at 150 *livres*. Although no valuation was taken of the clothing worn by Françoise Le Provost and her children, the valuator thought it their duty to include in the inventory a velvet dress, lined with green woollen-velvet (*panne*), and trimmed with buttons with gold and silver stems, valued at 200 *livres*, and a cap of white satin trimmed with gold and silver lace, 3 *livres*.

There were few works of art—a tapestry-hanging with groups of figures was the only thing of any value. It was priced at 500 *livres*, but it was at Tours.

There was a silver tray, used as a *bénitier*, with a chased Madonna—20 *livres*. A little picture, like a sort of reliquary, enriched with gilded copper, representing an Annunciation—20 *livres*. Another small picture, framed in ebony, representing a shrub and a Madonna—100 *sous*. The principal item of personal property consisted of 230 *marcs*¹ and four ounces

¹ An old French weight. (Translator's note).

of silver plate, valued at 26 *livres* the *marc*: 6,023 *livres*.

Finally, the inventory shows "a carriage, lined blue-grey cloth, with its curtains and harness," 150 *livres*; another little carriage, "such as it is," lined with serge, with its harness, 60 *livres*; four old chestnut carriage-horses, valued at about 100 *livres*. A black horse—doubtless Laurent de La Vallière's mount—150 *livres*; four others, quoted at 85 *livres* for the four. A donkey—their rustic steed and, we may be sure, the joy of the children—was valued at 10 *livres*. The "best" carriage had been left at Tours: it was lined with red velvet, and estimated at 200 *livres*. There are details which would lead one to believe that for some time the La Vallières had not been living in the house at Tours, and had, indeed, partly sublet it. . . . To sum up, when the cattle in the stables, the wine in the cellars, and so on, were included, the total came to 18,335 *livres*, 7 *sous*.

We now come to the statement of debts due. These were of every kind—and some of them pressing: such as debts to old servants, who for years had left their wages in their master's hands. At first sight the total did not seem to be more than 12,575 *livres*, but it soon became evident that another lot to the same amount was also due, so that the whole sum owing rose to 25,000 *livres*.

Françoise Le Provost then intervened, and proposed to take the furniture at the inventoried price, augmented by 20 *deniers*¹ in each *livre*. The family consented to that, regarding it as a point of honour that the Castle of La Vallière should not be dismantled. The lady was, moreover, to pay her husband's debts—about 25,000 francs—with a claim, however, against the Abbé de La Vallière, uncle of the minors, for

¹ An old French coin.

all debts of his which could be proved. In any case, these minors were to pay their mother the interest of her claims on them, at the rate of five per cent.

The two children, in fact, were stripped as naked as little Saint Johns! The widow stated to the council that it was now nearly time to send François to school, and that he must have a tutor and a servant-man; and that in a year or two Louise also would require a personal servant—*fille de suite* (as such a person was called, except in Paris, where the term *servante* had long been adopted). Naturally these expenses would be reckoned among those which carried interest. This clause inspired the council with notions of strict economy: the boy's household was established upon the diminished footing of 1,500 *livres* a year, and that of Louise upon a third of that sum. Thus, as we see, the chains of debt weighed down the son and daughter of Laurent de La Vallière from their earliest childhood.

Laurent had been given a representative in the Lieutenancy of Amboise. Thanks to the admirable defence of the place, the somewhat distracted force which, in 1652, took the title of "Royal Army," was able without excessive difficulty to reascend the Loire and get as far as Orleans, which town however still refused it admission. "La Grande Mademoiselle," who held the keys, thought well to explain the reasons of her conduct to the principal *valet-de-chambre* of Louis XIV., who was on his way to rejoin his master; and she added that a certain means of regaining peace would be to give her that small monarch for a husband. Much honoured by her confidence, the simple fellow hastened to propose the expedient to the Queen-mother, and drew down upon himself the striking reply "that the King was not made for Mademoiselle to poke her nose into, however long it might be."

Our story will show the consequences of this last attempt of the Fronde both for the Princess of Orleans, now a mature young lady, and for the innocent eight-year-old Louise de La Vallière, who may at this time have seen the royal youth, Louis XIV., as he passed beneath some castle from the battlements of which she was gazing. The Court was never to forgive Mlle de Montpensier her bellicose freak of 1652, and she was never to forget that the gates of Amboise had been shut against her. The following year she passed through the town pacifically, and was magnificently received, guns being fired in her honour—but in vain! Her rancour lasted while she lived.¹

This same year, towards the end of the month of August, the roads were scarcely open before a very singular little party arrived at the ancient castle of Louis XII. In a carrying-chair, a small, sickly, deformed man, physically impotent but mentally alert, was groaning and jesting at the same moment; behind him, in a sort of coach, came a handsome young woman, who seemed resigned to her fate. They were "Monsieur Scarron, burlesque-author" and Mlle d'Aubigné, his wife, whom he had married "in friendship" six months before. The newly married pair were on their way to America, and, while waiting to embark, they stopped at a little domain about half a league from the town, in the parish of Négron, which, by an odd coincidence, was called the Manor of La Vallière. There, between the pleasant hill-country of Nazelle and the majestic slopes of Amboise—there, on that fair isle of the Loire, under the reddening autumn-foliage, Scarron, driven from the capital by his hatred for his mother-in-law and the miseries of his own existence, began to feel a little

1 Mlle DE MONTPENSIER, *Mémoires*, v. II. p. 275.

better, and, as he did so, to regain something of his lost affection for his own country. Calmed and restored, he went back to Paris, taking with him the young wife—gossips said, the “friend” merely—who was one day to be known as Madame de Maintenon.¹

On August 28, 1654, Françoise Le Provost styled herself *haute et puissante dame* in a baptismal certificate at Amboise; but in the month of October following, Gaston, the father of Mademoiselle, appointed a gentleman called Olivier his Lieutenant at the Castle in that town—in other words, the office was ravished from the La Vallières.² This was a warning for the proud, mercenary woman. The most consolable of widows, she soon forgot the Lord of La Vallière for Jacques de Courtarvel, Marquis of Saint-Remi, First Steward to Gaston d'Orléans (March 6, 1655).

There were reasons, however, why this union had

¹ LORET, *Muse historique*, v. I. p. 252. Edition LIVET. June, 1652.

“Ledit personnage
Ayant contracté mariage
Avec une épouse, ou moitié,
Qu'il a prise par amitié.”

Id. Ibid. v. I. p. 295. October, 1652. “Luy dans une chaize, elle en coche.” Scarron had been intending to depart ever since December 1651 (LORET, *ibid.* v. I. p. 193) with an old woman-friend, “the amiable Sister Céleste.” Monsieur Lavallée (*Correspondance générale de Madame de Maintenon*, v. I. p. 65), quotes a letter from M. de Méré in which this voyage of Scarron's is mentioned. He gives it the date of 1656. This is wrong. See a letter from Scarron to Madame de Fiesque, in the *Dernières Œuvres de Monsieur Scarron*, v. I. p. 1 (Paris, 1709)—written about March 1652. See also a letter to Monsieur Sarrazin, *ibid.* p. 8. See l'Abbé CHEVALIER, *Guide en Touraine*, p. 142; *Inventaire analytique des archives municipales d'Amboise*, p. 295; and *Le Poète Scarron à Négron* in the *Soc. arch. de Touraine*, Bull. I. 35.¹

² After the month of October, 1654, Gaston appointed this gentleman Olivier to the Castle of Amboise. On August 28, 1654, *haute et puissante dame*, Françoise Le Provost, widow of Messire Laurent Le Blanc, Esquire, *sieur* of La Vallière, Baron de la Papelardière, Lieutenant of the King in the Government of Amboise, is cited as god-mother in a baptismal certificate (*Archives municipales d'Amboise*, p. 295).

a certain suitability. Saint-Remi¹ was a widower with a little daughter of the same age as Louise. He needed a woman's care for his child. Madame de La Vallière, on her side, would require the help of a man in bringing up her boy Jean-François, aged twelve. Saint-Remi seems to have performed this duty well: he increased to a thousand crowns the pension accorded to Laurent's children.² The two families, grouped into one, rejoined the Court which Monseigneur, the King's uncle, held at Blois, whither he had retired after the last check suffered by the Fronde.

Louis XII., Francis I., and Gaston himself had successively erected sumptuous constructions, in varying styles, upon the site of the dungeon and the Court of Honour of the old Castle of the Counts of Blois. In front of the façade—called Louis XII.'s—was the first enclosure, the *basse-cour*. Vast servants' quarters, a church built in the eleventh century, the abode of the canons connected with it, quarters for the Count's officers, the house of George of Amboise, the mansion of the Duc d'Épernon, and that other mansion where Richelieu had the Prince de Vendôme arrested in June, 1626, surrounded the castle, forming a picturesque ring, as it were, of memory-haunted and uninhabitable houses.³ It was to this place that Courtarvel and the La Vallières came to take up their abode in April, 1655, in a house which was let to them for 200 *livres* a year by Messire Bourdonneau, Incumbent of Saint-Eustache in the Church of Saint-Sauveur. Four years later, Gaston's *maître-d'hôtel* found himself more cramped

¹ Saint-Remi's wife had been N. de Langan-Boisfèvre, of a noble and ancient Breton family (SAINT-ALLAIS, *Nobiliaire universel* v. XIII p. 179). See LEMOINE and LICHTENBERGER, *De La Vallière à Montespan*, p. 46.

² Le Père ANSELME, *Histoire généalogique*, v. V. p. 195.

³ *Les Résidences royales de la Loire*, by LOISELEUR, p. 72. Paris, 1863.

in circumstances, and rented in the same enclosure (*basse-cour*) part of a house—consisting of a reception-room looking out upon the courtyard, a lofty room with a wardrobe in it, and a garret above, for 120 *livres* a year.¹

The Courtarvels, in short, were pulling the devil by the tail! We find them selling, conjointly with Jehan Lambert, Judge and Magistrate in the Bailiwick and Bench of Blois, 66 *livres* 18 *sous* 4 *deniers*' worth of stocks raised upon their estate and manor of Rameau and Bois Reimbourg, in the parish of Laugé. A burgess, Pierre Chevalier, bought this stock for his grand-daughter Anne, for 1,200 *livres tournois*, money down; and at the same time and before the same notary, Courtarvel and his wife bound themselves to protect Lambert from any consequences resulting from a deed which he had signed only at their request and to do them a favour. In other words, it was simply an act of benevolence on his part towards needy friends, who could have got no money on their own signatures, nor on the Rameau property.

And yet life was certainly not extravagant at the quiet Court of Blois. Monsieur, turned religious, was living in exile less from necessity than from choice. With him dwelt Marguerite de Lorraine, his second wife. This Princess, a virtuous woman but a cold wife, and the irritated step-mother of an insupportable step-daughter,² was the real mother of three charming girls, for whom she cared little. She thought of nothing but her devotions, "yet punctuated her prayers with continual meals, by way of curing herself

¹ Minute of Lespine, Notary at Blois, November 11, 1659. Copy communicated by M. Lemoine, archivist-paleographer.

² See a charming piece of verse in the miscellaneous manuscript works of M. de Paulmy, quoted by M. de la Saussaye, in his *Histoire du château de Blois*. See also, by the same author, *Notice sur le château de Blois*, p. 82.

of the vapours, which were much increased thereby." She saw her daughters only for a hurried ten minutes or so in the morning and evening, and never said a word to them except "Hold yourselves up! Lift up your heads!" "These young ladies loitered about their rooms with a lot of other little girls, and there wasn't a single soul of any consequence or authority to look after them."¹

Our informant here is Madame's step-daughter, Mlle de Montpensier—"la Grande Mademoiselle"—and further on she expresses herself even more disdainfully. "There were five or six girls there," she says, "of all sorts and descriptions." Of these six, we already know two: Louise de La Vallière and Mlle de Saint-Remi. Another, Mlle Montalais, was later on to become notorious for her intriguing disposition. A fourth, Mlle de Raré, was the daughter of the Princesses' governess. The Princesses themselves had been somewhat carelessly brought up. In their little neglected circle they talked of many things, indeed of most: "Children of that age are frequently interested in much besides their dolls." When Mademoiselle came to spend a few days at Blois, she afforded her step-sisters the diversion of amateur theatricals, which put the finishing-stroke to the turning of the already too-impressionable little heads. The failure of their elder had not discouraged these ambitious maidens; they really hoped that one of them might still sit on the throne of France! That was no joke to Mademoiselle, when she discovered it; for, as she says in her naïve jealousy, "One doesn't enjoy seeing one's younger sister set above one." But, once she was gone, they only dreamed the more, and they called Marguerite d'Orléans the "little Queen."

Louise de La Vallière was influenced by all this

¹ Mlle DE MONTPENSIER, *Mémoires*, v. III. p. 376.

budding romance. She was then nearly fourteen. To this year of her life belong two anecdotes, very different from one another, yet both entirely credible. For good or for ill, the girl had been born with the gift of charm. Though the Court was full of grave and reverend seigniors, there were attractive youths there as well, the sons of the Duke's officers. Next door to the Saint-Remis lived the Bragelongnes, and a young man belonging to this family saw Louise, and, having seen her, felt his heart stir in his breast. He said it, and he wrote it. There were answers, further declarations, more answers—a little correspondence, in fact, which the parents discovered and suppressed.¹ 'Tis like the blood in spring-time; young passion has these outbursts, which disdain reason and die without leaving a pang behind. Not yet has love spoken; this is but the love of love.

The second anecdote, compared with this unconscious manifestation of a young and tender heart, shows the more customary reserve of the girl, her natural sense of modesty. At this time of day it is difficult to render shades so delicate; therefore we think well to yield the floor to a long-ago biographer of our Louise—one who had access to private sources of information. . . . Several young ladies, friends and contemporaries of Mlle de La Vallière, having on some occasion displayed considerable lightness of conduct, the Prince (Gaston d'Orléans) showed his displeasure very plainly, and said publicly, "As for Mlle de La Vallière, I am sure that she had nothing to do with it; she is too discreet for anything of the sort."

That much is negligible; what follows is the

¹ MME DE LA FAYETTE, *Histoire de Madame Henriette*, p. 78. Edition of 1720 or 1742. Both have the same pagination. See also SAINT-ALLAIS, *Nobiliaire universel*, v. VIII. p. 318. This particular Bragelongne was a son of Jacques de Bragelongne, second of the name steward of Gaston, Duc d'Orléans,

important part. "She (La Vallière) has since confessed that this striking tribute from so irreproachable a witness to the regularity of her conduct, was for her a mortal injury; it made her conceive so flattering an opinion of herself that she has never doubted but that her secret presumption was, by a just but awful punishment from Almighty God, the fatal cause of her misfortunes and her fall from grace."¹ Thus, in these earliest revelations, does Louise show herself precisely as she will be depicted in our further pages—sensitive, discreet, and proud; and a little vain, perhaps, of her youthful discretion.

While all these little girls at Blois were cherishing delightful illusions and disposing of the hand of Louis XIV., he, a boy of nineteen, was entering upon the paths which are trodden by all adolescent human beings. He had been blessed with the precious gift of vitality. Tall, healthy, sober, continent,² entirely sound in body, with less regularity of feature than his brother Philippe, but more virile-looking, he was on the whole a handsome and attractive young man. In his adolescence, he had shown himself quick to yield to his passions, yet quicker still to sacrifice them to reason or his personal glory. If we believe the Court gossip, he had, like many another, made something of a fool of himself in his first affair—had been, in fact, the victim of a valetudinarian lady-veteran of *galanterie*.³ Even if they be true, these anecdotes are

¹ *Lettres de Madame de La Vallière*. Préface, p. 4. Liège (Paris), 1769.

² GUY-PATIN, *Lettres*, v. I. p. 307: "The King is a well-made Prince, tall and lusty. He drinks hardly any wine, is in no way dissipated, and is quite whole, sound, and untainted" (July 20, 1658). A passage in the *Mémoires* of LA PORTE (Geneva edition, p. 290), *valet-de-chambre* to the King, though insufficient as a proof against Mazarin, clearly reveals the profound innocence of Louis' mind. The *Journal de la santé du roi* (p. 28) is decisive on this matter.

³ *Correspondance complète de Madame, duchesse d'Orléans*, v. I. pp. 269, 286, 1857 edition; SAINT-SIMON, *Mémoires*, v. I. p. 261 (Paris).

of no importance. Everything, on the contrary, proves that Louis was carefully brought up by a mother who, if she had not much insight, was at any rate most devoted, and absolutely incapable of any kind of base connivance.

The widow of Louis XIII., Anne of Austria, had, partly perhaps from kindness, but largely from weakness, received the nieces of Mazarin at the Palais-Royal, and these little girls lived with her son like members of the same family. The time came when Louis fell in love, as all the young men did, with the pretty Italians; and, also quite naturally, he began with the eldest. Olympe Mancini, a maiden of merely mediocre beauty, but already of opulent form, very quick-witted, and most forward, was then about the King's own age—sixteen; so that she was relatively older, which was one secret of her attraction for the boy.¹ This was first made manifest on a certain day in the year 1655. Anne of Austria was giving a small dance to amuse the Princess Henrietta of England, who was scarcely eleven years old. But Louis, who led off the ball, chose as his partner a cousin of Olympe Mancini, Madame de Mercœur, also Mazarin's niece. The Queen, astonished at this misdemeanour, hastened to her son, snatched away his partner, and told him in a whisper to go and invite the little Princess to dance. Later on she scolded him, upon which the boy remarked that "he didn't like little girls." But the childish incident had its serious consequences.

Louis was seeing Olympe Mancini with eyes which

Hachette, 1879). There was not even a flirtation between the King and Elizabeth de Tarneau, 1651. See LORET, v. I. p. 107; *Histoire amoureuse des Gaules*, v. II, p. 30. The intrigue with a gardener's daughter had, according to Saint-Simon, more definite results; but neither the fact nor the date is sufficiently attested.

¹ Mme DE MOTTEVILLE, *Mémoires*, v. IV. p. 52.

seemed now for the first time to perceive, among many unnoticed women—the Woman. The Italian girl, too young herself to be touched by this simple passion—and, moreover, already a calculating damsel—was not quite satisfied with the “flattering hopes” it inspired, and preferred to the Royal flirtation, a solid marriage with Prince Eugene of Savoy, better known as the Comte de Soissons (February, 1657). The young King, as happens often at this inflammable period, accepted her marriage “without pain or vexation.”¹ He was sent off to travel for a few months, from March to November, and shown the siege of Montmédy. In a word, when the new-made Mars returned to Paris for the winter-quarters,² he arrived just exactly in time to stand godfather to the lady’s first-born son.

He was soon in love again, and more ardently than ever. Mlle de La Motte-Argencourt, a young girl who had lately entered the service of the Queen-mother, was not distinguished by any wonderful beauty; but her golden hair framed an expressive face, and, beneath black eyebrows, sparkled blue eyes that were both sweet and brilliant. She was a charming-looking person, and “she had an attractive way of speaking.” Quite evidently, she was a good girl—too good, perhaps! The King was captivated, showed it plainly, and, for the first time, “expressed himself like a man in love, who is no longer content to be reasonable.” He was then nineteen, and his love-affairs were carefully watched. Profiting by the resistance of Mlle de La Motte, who, though almost offered to the King by her mother, was defending herself by a sort of natural sense of right, Anne of Austria quickly regained her influence over her son.

¹ MME DE MOTTEVILLE, *Mémoires*, v. IV. p. 83.

² LORET, *Muse historique*, v. II. p. 104.

Touched by her gentle remonstrances, Louis groaned, sighed, confessed in the Queen's own oratory, "so that no one might know"; then went, though it was the depth of winter, on a little trip to the bleak Castle of Vincennes, and came back resolved to have nothing more to do with "that girl."¹ But lo and behold! two days afterwards, up she came herself and asked him to dance with her. The young man was observed to turn white and red alternately, and all through the dance his hand trembled in the hand of his partner. Anything might now have happened, if a strange auxiliary had not come to the support of the tottering Royal virtue.

Mazarin—one prefers, just here, not to call him the Cardinal—after having at first hinted to his pupil that "a man must have his fling," suddenly changed his tactics entirely. Two spies,² and, worse than that, the girl's own mother,³ told him all there was to know about the girlish intrigues of this favourite-to-be. Mazarin took the King aside, and hinted that the lovely *ingénue* had laughed at his passion with her girl-friends—perhaps with her lovers too. The interview lasted three hours. It is easy to imagine the effect of these accusations—true or false—upon

¹ "Nonobstant le temps glacial
Louis, avec son train royal,
A presque passé la semaine,
Dans le froid Château de Vinceine
Et monsieur l'Éminent aussy."

La Muse historique, letter of January 24, 1658, v. II. p. 437. See PONCET DE LA GRAVE, *Mémoires intér : pour servir à l'Histoire de France*, v. II. p. 86.

² La Fare names them: "Roussereau et Chamarante" (*Mémoires*, ch. IV. p. 53 of the Amsterdam edition, 1749). La Fare elsewhere confuses La Motte-Argencourt with La Motte-Houdancourt.

³ "Believing that, by this submission, she would gain over the Minister to permit the King to continue being her daughter's lover, and to make her fortune for her." Her daughter took no part whatever in this odious arrangement (Mme DE MOTTEVILLE, *Mémoires*, v. IV. p. 86).

the mind of a boy of nineteen. Next day, the wily Minister took occasion to jest about the little incident, and said to Mlle de Montpensier: "People talk so much that one would be most unhappy if one believed all one hears. Why, they actually say that the King is in love with Mlle de La Motte, and that the Queen and I are in despair. I assure you that if we ever *had* been, we should have quite got over it by now, for I believe that fancy is already a thing of the past" (January 15, 1658).

Had Mlle de La Motte done something foolish? Perhaps she had. But, in reality, an influence far stronger than that of these base denunciations was working upon the King's mind. He divined that the girl had no real feeling for him, and young Princes are like other young men in not loving long if they do not feel themselves beloved. 'Twas in any case a boy's passion for a "grown-up girl"—who, for her part, wants a "grown-up man"! Careless historians¹ represent poor little La Motte as hurried into a convent at Chaillot, there to expiate—first in the rôle!—her involuntary crime of having charmed a King for a brief hour. This forced retreat did not actually take place till three years later, and the King had nothing whatever to do with it.²

At nineteen, even though one be a Prince, such sudden disillusionments are more or less mortifying. The despised lover took refuge in the remembrance

¹ The *Mémoires* of Mme de la Motteville here contain an error which may be merely that of a copyist. *Mémoires*, v. IV. p. 86.

² Mme de Motteville explains this point, as she always does, better than any one else; but her narrative finishes with a chronological error which has led astray nearly all who have copied it without comparing texts. Mlle de Montpensier, who was writing at the same time, if not a little sooner, speaks of Mlle de La Motte-Argencourt as being with the Queen-mother in 1658, and in 1660. See *Mémoires*, v. III. pp. 275, 288. WALCKENAER (*Mémoires sur Mme de Sévigné* v. III. ch. IX.), has given too much prominence to the La Motte episode,

of his first passion—that for Olympe Mancini, now Comtesse de Soissons, and for some time “seemed half-bewitched again.” Six months had gone by in this Platonic reverie, when Louis was permitted to join the army which besieged Dunkirk and won the victory of the Dunes. It was then that he developed a taste for the profession of soldier and conqueror. If he did not experience the actual dangers of war in this campaign, he at any rate went through its fatigues. Incessantly on horseback during the hottest part of the summer-days, riding over burning sand or stifling marshes, staying out foolishly in the evening-damps and then returning to the pestilential fort at Mardick—imprudent, moreover, in his consumption of lemonade and sweetmeats,¹ the grandson of Henri IV. was finally brought low by a malignant fever (June 29). He concealed his illness for two days, but at last he had to let himself be brought back to Calais. His whole body swelled as if he had been bitten by a serpent; he was terribly enervated, terribly depressed.² Feeling himself grow weaker, the Prince summoned Mazarin, and begged him, as the most sincere of his advisers, to tell him the truth: “My mother,” said the almost dying boy, “loves me too dearly to let me know that I am in danger; I daresay indeed that, out of pity for her, they hold out hopes of my recovery. You are the only person

and has made the mistake which we pointed out above. AMÉDÉE RENÉE (*Les Nièces de Mazarin*, p. 249), has mixed up the epochs. His pleasant book lacks chronological accuracy, and this want of precision robs it of much of its value. “This accident has really no date”—it is all too easy to say that! As to those authors who have confused La Motte-Argencourt and La Motte-Houdancourt—the two La Motte-Houdancourts, niece and daughter of the Marshal—it would be merely idle to cite them.

¹ *Histoire du traité de paix conclu en Pan 1659*. À Cologne, chez Pierre de la Place, 1665, p. 7.

² *Journal de la santé du roi*, p. 53.

from whom I can ask this kindness—tell me the truth, so that I may put my conscience and my State in order.” Mazarin acknowledged that God and nature were now his only aids—that he must commend his spirit to the One, and that all must do what they could to assist the other. Then Louis confessed, communicated—and awaited events.¹ In this supreme hour, when all around him were uneasily guessing at the future, the dying King caught sight of a tall girl, who was really weeping—“weeping fit to kill herself.” It was the Cardinal’s second niece. Very thin, dark-skinned, with irregular but striking features, masses of glossy black hair, a wide forehead, eyes as black as her hair and astonishingly brilliant—such was Marie Mancini, then seventeen years old. Women thought her “quite ugly”;² and, till that moment, Louis had hardly noticed the odd-looking Italian girl. He was therefore all the more deeply affected when he saw the resolute young face convulsed with grief because he was suffering. Marie looked sweet and good that day, and so to him she

¹ *Histoire du traité*, etc., p. 8. This history, evidently written by a well-informed person, is attributed to the Count Galeazzo Gualdo Priorato by a German publisher. See *Il trattato della pace fra le due corone*. At Bremen, 1663.

² Mme DE MOTTEVILLE, *Mémoires*, v. IV. p. 89. I saw quite recently, at the Drouot Gallery, a portrait of Marie Mancini, which showed a sweet and unusually fascinating face. One had an impression of smiling, blooming loveliness. What was the explanation of the difference between the descriptions of 1658 and the portrait of, say 1661? A very simple one: the portrait was really of Hortense. See a portrait of Marie, drawn by Croizier, after Lely.

Following the *Mémoires de M. L. P. M. N. Colonne, grand connétable du royaume de Naples*, 1676, is a letter signed N. N., which is little more than a pen-portrait of Marie Mancini. In it, amid various glosses, we recognise Mme de Motteville’s description. All the contemporary pamphleteers are unanimous in their view of her appearance. “She did not look a bit like a person of rank.” “She looked like the landlady of an inn, but her intellect was divine” (*Les Agréments de la jeunesse de Louis XIV.—Le Palais-Royal.—Histoire, des Gaulles*, v. II. p. 31, Boiteau edition).

looked beautiful. . . But his fever was still running high. The doctors, at their wits' end, had recourse to a desperate remedy : "antimony, administered in an emetic wine." When this draught was presented to him in a silver goblet, the invalid inquired if the Cardinal advised him to take it, and on being told that he did : "Very well, then—give it me!"¹ Shortly afterwards—either the remedy was effective, or his young vigour was invincible—Louis rose from bed, "a well man" . . . and a man in love, eager to get back to Paris, where the fair mourner already was.

One of the Mancini women has left us a convincing little sketch of the King's change of mind. "He never speaks to me now," she wrote to her uncle, Mazarin, "ever since one night when I stayed on to a dance. I don't know what was the matter with him, unless it was that my sister and he had quarrelled, and were sulking ; and I took the liberty of speaking to him about it. I began by asking if my sister was in the sulks. He said she was, but then she always was ; and I said it didn't matter for her, but it did for him, and that he was in the most abominable temper, and it was very foolish of him, for people were saying all sorts of things, comparing them to two sulky babies, never in a good humour for a minute at a time. And, really, people *are* saying he's in love with her ; and, as it certainly can't be on account of her good looks or her cleverness, they say it must be because he thinks she has a better disposition than the rest of us. You know how spiteful people can be ; but it's most horribly vexing, all the same. And the whole evening, after I had said that, he wouldn't

¹ *Histoire du traité de la paix*, p. 9 ; *Journal de la santé du roi*, p. 63. Vallot does not mention a Celestin monk named Garneau, whom Loret gives as the inventor of emetic wine (*La Muse historique*, July, 1658, v. II. (book LX., letter XVIII.), p. 505).

“speak to me, and has treated me ever since as if he had never known me, or seen me, in his life.”¹

It is probably to Olympe Mancini, Comtesse de Soissons, that we are to attribute this outburst of barely concealed jealousy. Her sister Marie, knowing her power, took little notice of such criticisms. Had she not “a divine”—some said “a demoniac”—intellect!

The Court then went to Fontainebleau. There they floated on the water to the sound of violins; they drove to Franchart, they visited the hermit; in the evenings danced till midnight, sometimes till one in the morning. . . . And Marie Mancini was Queen of all the fêtes! Audacious by nature, discreet by common sense, for ever thinking of her elder sister's position and desirous of outshining her—finally, proud of her influence over the young Sovereign who might place the crown upon her brow, she played so cleverly her part of loving Louis “for himself” that the simple boy became utterly her slave.

Just as in family-circles such childish mistakes are of little account, so the European Courts paid scant attention to these love-affairs in their anxiety to discover an eligible bride for the King of France. All the Princesses were “awaiting the event of this selection,” and three, in different ways, seemed specially marked out:

The Princess Henrietta of England, daughter of Charles I., grand-daughter of Henri IV., beloved by the Queen-mother, but detested by Mazarin, who had managed to inspire the young King with his dislike;

The Infanta of Spain, an alliance ardently desired

¹ *Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire de France*, v. I. p. 164. A. RENÉE (*Les Nièces de Mazarin*), attributes this letter to Olympe Mancini, Comtesse de Soissons.

by Anne of Austria, her aunt, but unpleasing to the Cardinal ;

Finally, the Princess of Savoy, who was the first selected, because she was connected with the Minister's own family.

To examine the Cardinal's political combinations would take too much time. It is only necessary now to study the moral conditions surrounding the youth who was to be the future seducer of Louise de La Vallière.

At the first hint of marriage—and it was a striking proof of his, at any rate, relative innocence!—the young man quivered with delight, and immediately departed for Lyons, the place arranged for the interview.

Political complications stopped him at Dijon. As if he had completely forgotten the object of his journey, we find him recommencing all his old diversions. He danced every evening, and ordered a wonderful collation, almost a supper. All of a sudden, everybody was doing exactly as everybody liked. "They always began with cards. The Marquis d'Alluye and de Richelieu would play ; Hortense was sure to be at the table with Marianne, the Grand Master, and others. The King would talk with Mademoiselle Mancini," and his passion seemed to be entirely renewed. Suddenly there came a change. The political difficulties arranged themselves. They started off for the matrimonial interview ; of Marie Mancini, not a word more !

The King, a King of about twenty, had always said that he wanted a beautiful wife. The Princess

Marguerite scarcely answered to this youthful ideal, but the Cardinal (expert in everything), counting upon his wish for marriage, felt sure that if he saw *only* her he would be content with her.

And indeed, wild with impatience to see his future bride, Louis rode to meet her, greeted her not without emotion, gazed at her, then, returning at a gallop towards his mother's carriage, "She is charming," he cried, "and very like her portraits; a little olive-skinned, but that doesn't spoil her—she has a beautiful figure." The whole Court knew that the Princess had a large, strongly-marked mouth, the heavy cheeks of the Bourbons, an unbeautiful nose, and a bad complexion; but Louis saw her with the eyes of youth, which find every woman lovely. Seated in the same carriage, he talked gaily to her. She replied as gaily, and from the first they seemed to get on splendidly together. The next morning, under pretext of visiting the Duke of Savoy, Louis surprised the Princess at her toilet. She was combing her hair, which lay in masses on her shoulders. She seemed even more charming in this *négligé*, and he was more delighted with her than ever.¹

Everything was going on splendidly when there arrived mysteriously in Lyons Monsieur de Pimentel, Envoy from the Court of Spain, which had at last decided to accord, or rather perhaps to offer, the hand of the Infanta to the King of France. Pimentel, who had already written to the Prime Minister, knew one of Cardinal Mazarin's servants, named Colbert. They had an interview together. Colbert hastily in-

¹ *Histoire du traité de la paix*, p. 24. Mlle de Montpensier writes of this same visit, but says it took place on a different day, and represents the King as quite indifferent to the Princess's charms. Mademoiselle, very tenacious of her rights and precedence, cannot be relied on to the same extent as *L'Histoire du traité* and Mme de Motteville.

formed his master, who warned the Queen-mother, and she instantly commanded the King to dismiss all thoughts of the Princess of Savoy.

But the young man, who was dying to be married, turned restive, and declared that he wished for the Princess, and that, after all, he was the master. Still more surprising, the Cardinal pretended that he did not in the least prefer the Infanta to anybody else ! Then Anne of Austria wept, pleaded, and prayed in all the churches that the Savoy marriage might be wiped out of that Heavenly Book in which, two days before, they had solemnly declared that it was written "for all eternity" !

At this moment, Marie Mancini reappeared upon the scene. Wildly jealous, she could not conceal her rage on seeing Louis so enthusiastic over the Princess's beautiful hair : "Aren't you ashamed that they should want you to have such a hideous wife ?" she said to him rudely. Immediately, to mollify the passionate creature, Louis began to show some coldness to the Princess ; indeed that very day, the Queen-mother, though she did not like Marie Mancini, perceived with pleasure the effect of her influence. They persuaded the young man that it was only necessary to substitute one *fiancée* for the other, and that, in any case, he should soon have a wife. The Duchess of Savoy took back her daughter, with a letter from the King, signed by his own hand, in which he promised to marry the Princess Marguerite if he could not have the Infanta. However, Louis seemed to care as little now for the Spanish girl as for the Savoy one. He thought of nothing but going about with Marie Mancini, at first in the daytime, then in the evening by moonlight, sometimes following her carriage, sometimes seated on the box acting as coachman, finally entering the carriage. Marie was slightly

unwell, and Louis asked for news of her every day. Overjoyed at having broken off the Savoy marriage, the Queen-mother shut her eyes to it all.

They returned to Paris. There, remembering the facility with which the King had accepted the first wife suggested to him, and surer than ever of her power, Marie Mancini, passionate, audacious, and resolute, made up her mind to become Queen of France. . . But what was Mazarin thinking? Outwardly he appeared to condemn.

"It has always been a great problem whether the Cardinal acted in good faith, or only opposed the torrent to augment its violence. I have heard the old Maréchal de Villeroy and the late Monsieur Le Premier eagerly argue the point. They brought forward a number of reasons both for and against, and usually they concluded in favour of the Cardinal's sincerity; not that they did not believe him to be sufficiently ambitious to have wished to see his niece Queen of France, but they also knew him to be timid, and incapable of going directly against the Queen-mother, who would have become his irreconcilable enemy—and that upon the uncertain asseveration of a man of twenty-five, who was in love for the first time! Whereas, by refusing to exalt a niece whom he had no reason to love very tenderly (he knew that she was foolish enough to laugh at him from morning till night)—by playing the hero who despised a crown, he actually became a hero and a pacificator as well, thereby increasing his own influence, and entirely convincing the King of his inviolable attachment to the glory of his person, and the well-being of the State."¹

As a matter of fact, Mazarin went so far as to speak to the Queen in an ambiguous manner of the possi-

¹ *Mémoires de Choisy*, v. I. p. 82, 1727 edition; p. 569, Michaud edition.

bility of this marriage, and it made her so uneasy that she actually prepared a formal protest.¹ Finally the Cardinal made up his own mind, and protested definitely against the romantic scheme.

The young man begged and besought, and offered formally to marry Marie. Our cold politician, incomparable actor that he was, refused in such moving terms that one could not but believe they came from the heart. His niece, who was not deceived, heaped ironical reproaches upon the King. That had been so successful a method at Lyons! "*Vous êtes le maître, et vous pleurez.*"²

Louis wept; but, tender and reasonable at once, he let her go (June 22, 1659). Scarcely were they separated than, by the help of young Vivonne, son of Monsieur de Mortemart, a correspondence was established between them. The King shut himself

¹ *Ibid.*—Mme DE MOTTEVILLE, *Mémoires*, v. IV. pp. 144 and 151. The *Mémoires* of Mme DE MOTTEVILLE give a number of different impressions upon this subject. She does not doubt that Mazarin had contemplated the step, and cherished some resentment towards the Queen for her resistance; but then, further on, she seems to admit that he was quite resigned, and that this resignation was one of the most beautiful incidents of his life. To know the truth, we must await the Day of Judgment; but Mazarin must not blame us if we are inclined to believe that, for one moment, he dreamt of being the uncle of the King! His niece Hortense thought as we do.

² "It is said that she could not refrain herself, and cried: '*Vous pleurez et vous êtes le maître*'" (Mlle DE MONTPENSIER, v. IV. p. 155). Mme de Motteville wrote this part of her book after 1666. See *ibid.* p. 312, "*Vous m'aimez, sire; vous pleurez; vous vous désespérez, vous estes le roy, et cependant je pars*" (*Le Palais-Royal: Hist. amour. des Gauls*, v. II. p. 33). This pamphlet was written about 1665. Finally, in Marie Mancini's *Memoirs* we read: "*Sire, vous êtes roy, et vous m'aimez, et pourtant vous souffrez que je parte.*" "But as he did not answer, I caught one of his lace-cuffs and tore it, going away from him and saying, 'Ha! I am abandoned.' Then I left for Italy." This last detail, chronologically erroneous, confirms our doubts of the authenticity of these memoirs. But they seem to be inaccurate more in detail than in essentials. This publication—a bad translation of some stolen or curtailed Italian copy—is very curious. Racine, in *Bérénice* (1677), Act IV. sc. v., makes Berenice say to Titus: "*Vous êtes empereur, seigneur, et vous pleurez.*"

up, and wasted more time in writing to Marie than he had formerly done in talking to her.¹ Anne of Austria, once informed of it, put an end to this affair.² Moreover, it was decided that it would be well to draw nearer to the Spanish frontier and the Infanta, so the Court set off and proceeded to Blois, where, quite unknown, dwelt Louise de La Vallière.

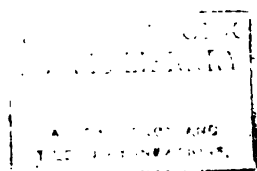
¹ Mazarin's letter to the King, July 16, 1659. See A. RENÉE, *Les Nièces de Mazarin*, p. 269. While the first edition of our book was in the press, MONSIEUR CHANTELAUZE published *Louis XIV. et Marie Mancini* (Paris, Didier), a very interesting work; and M. d'Heylli reprinted the *Véritables Mémoires de Marie Mancini* (Paris, Hilaire). The *Mémoires*, published first in Italian, and the *Véritables Mémoires* have a common basis, and probably a common origin.

² Mme DE MOTTEVILLE, *Mémoires*, v. IV. p. 163. The adolescence of Louis XIV. has been the subject of deep research by R. P. Chérot, of the Company of Jesus, in a number of articles published in the *Études*. These learned labours have been collected in a book, written with charm and profound erudition, *La première jeunesse de Louis XIV.* (Desclée, de Brower et Cie.). It would be well to read also two other works by the same author: *Trois éducations primitives au dix-septième siècle*, *Le Grand Condé*, etc. (Paris, Desclée 1896); *Bourdalone inconnu* (Paris, Rétaux, 1898). It would be ungrateful of me to forget an excellent article by this conscientious writer: *Fouquet, Ami des Livres*. I beg to offer R. P. Chérot my sincere gratitude and respect, together with my deepest sympathy in these trying times (1902). The Reverend Father died several months before this fourth edition went to press, at an age when he could still have rendered great services to literature and the Church. He was as zealous a priest as he was an erudite historian, and he did much to comfort the last days of our confrère, M. Duprez, Honorary Conservator of Manuscripts at the Bibliothèque Nationale, an unassuming and kindly scholar.



From an engraving after a picture by W. Vaillant.

LOUIS XIV.



CHAPTER II

1659—1661

THE beginning of the journey was very gay. As has been said, they were to pass through Blois, and, in passing, see the young Princess of Orleans. All the talk was of the little "Ex-Queen," Marguerite. As they approached the town, Louis said to his tall cousin, Mlle de Montpensier: "I thought I wouldn't change my coat, or have my hair dressed; for, if I looked my best, it would be too distressing for your father, your step-mother, and your sister to know I had slipped through their fingers. So I made myself as ugly as I could, that they might be disgusted with me." It was in this mood of boyish fatuity that he arrived at the Castle of Chambord. Behold! there were no princesses there at all. Either because the parents were angry, or because they were discreet, the girls had been sent to Blois. It was not until next day that Louis there saw them. They received him at the foot of the great staircase. Everyone knows the three exquisite statues of girls which decorate that wonderful entrance-hall—masterpieces then unappreciated. The formal taste of the time was almost hostile to these gems of the Renaissance. And, despite all that has been said by others, the King's eyes were equally incapable of appreciating that other beauty, less perfect perhaps than Goujon's creations, but alive,

and so seductive in her vitality !—Louise de La Vallière, standing, modestly obscure, behind the ladies of Orleans. Had the timid maiden any curiosity, any furtive glances, for the Prince of whom she had heard so much ? A handsome Prince is so very handsome !

On the whole, this encounter left no pleasant memories behind it. Gaston's officers, who were very well content with themselves, were not considered *à la mode*. A meal was served in an old-fashioned sort of style. "And the ladies were dressed like the dishes—all out of fashion." Anne of Austria, who was very fastidious, and the young King, whose thoughts were elsewhere, were in a hurry to be off ; Gaston, on his side, weary and ill, earnestly desired their departure. The guests, as soon as they were in their carriages, began to criticise all the details of the reception ; and Monsieur's own daughter, Mlle de Montpensier, sacrificing her father to her hatred for her step-mother, joined in the chorus, and was careful to preserve the memory of the mockeries in her book.¹

Mazarin, whether he liked it or not, had been obliged to allow Louis and Marie to meet at Saint-Jean-d'Angély (April 13, 1659). Louis instantly succumbed once more to the domination of this determined young lady-in-love. Fresh vows were exchanged. Marie even proposed that they should sign an odious engagement. Both of them were to marry if they were forced to do so, but they were to promise one another "not to get on" with their respective spouses. It seems that Louis hesitated to sign this abominable document, and at the same moment Mazarin definitely fulminated. He sent the King a letter

¹ Mlle DE MONTPENSIER, *Mémoires*, v. III. p. 376. See the counterpart of these memoirs in *La Muse historique* of Loret, who had his information from one of Gaston's officers, called Sanguin, v. III. p. 86.

(April 28, 1659)—a highly characteristic letter, long and diffuse, clearly expressing at last his inflexible opposition to projects which must henceforth be regarded as out of the question. And, as he had done two months before at Paris, Louis first resisted and then—yielded. At bottom, his thralldom to this passion was more apparent than real. Once he was away from Marie Mancini's insistent, burning gaze, his mother regained her great influence over him—and so did the rest of the world, keenly watchful, as he was aware, of all his actions.¹ Anne of Austria, indeed, found him more submissive than ever, and a still more unexpected result was that the Cardinal soon had occasion to felicitate his niece upon her return to reason!² Did this apparent resignation conceal an ulterior purpose? The Italian girl's enigmatic character would lead one to suppose so; but evidently her power of fascination was exhausted. On September 21, Louis signed, at Bordeaux, the letter which the Maréchal de Grammont was to take to the Infanta, confirming the request for her hand. "I beseech you very humbly to give your consent, and to consider the matter not solely as a step necessary for the welfare of our respective States, but, regarding me a little as a person keenly desirous of your friendship and esteem, to do me the favour of consulting your heart to some extent. You will find me ever ready to honour and respect you, and to

¹ Tallemant des Réaux, a far from prudish author, speaks of Louis XIV., towards 1658, in terms which prove his confidence in the good conduct of the youthful Prince. See *Historiettes*, v. V. p. 221.

² See letters to Mme de Venel and to Marie (September 23, 1659); *Lettres de Cardinal Mazarin*, v. II. pp. 61, 62; AMÉDÉE RENÉE, *Les Noces de Mazarin*, p. 32. See letters to the same of December 9, 1659: *Lettres*, v. II. p. 381. Marie begged her uncle not to marry her to the Constable Colonna, but to another Prince, probably the Prince of Lorraine, who had asked for one of the sisters, whichever they liked to give him. See, finally, a letter from Colbert to Mazarin, Jan. 2, 1660, *Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire de France*, 1834. Part First, p. 88.

show you by all my actions how solicitous I am that you shall never repent of the choice which it has pleased you to make."¹

And so the young King quickly altered from the despairing lover to the hopeful and happy *fiancé*. That natural feeling which, at Lyons, had drawn him towards the Princess Marguerite, now worked more powerfully still at Saint-Jean-de-Luz. One might say that, having wanted his wife before he knew her, he was most anxious to please her when he did know her, and behaved like a Prince not only gallant, but devoted.

The young Princess, who, for her greater glory than happiness, was going to link her fate with his, had been far from submitting to this alliance as a political necessity. On the contrary, she had always desired it. The daughter of a Frenchwoman who was also Queen of Spain, the niece of a Spanish woman who was also Queen of France, very proud of her illustrious origin and desirous not to derogate therefrom, she had grown up with the idea that the grandson of Henri IV. was the only person worthy to be her husband. When Madrid heard that Louis the God-given was going to marry the Princess of Savoy, the Infanta had felt her heart contract, then dilate, as her father exclaimed, "It can't be, and it won't be!" While the diplomats were still insistently enjoining silence upon her, she managed delicately to intimate that her desires outran their deliberations; and, once married, she joyfully crossed the frontier and presented herself to Louis with all the prestige of a great Princess, and all the trustful and gracious abandonment of a bride in love with her bridegroom.² The night of the Royal wedding was

¹ *Œuvres de Louis XIV.*, v. V. p. 6. Turenne is said to have dictated this letter, which the editor, somewhat inexplicably as we think, considers pompous.

² "I had time to observe minutely the behaviour of the Royalties, and my impression was that regret for having left a father was

a night of true love. They told her that the King was undressed. Instantly Marie-Thérèse "sat down on a couple of cushions beside her bed to get undressed herself—without going to the glass, just as she was ; and when she heard that the King was waiting : *Presto, presto, qu'el rey m'espera* : (' Quick, quick ; the King is waiting for me '). One may safely assign some tenderness and passion as the motive for such ready obedience. They went to bed with the Queen's blessing upon them—their common mother." (June 9, 1660.) The next day Louis "was in high good-humour . . . all was gaiety and mirth. He went to the Queen at once : 'twas the sweetest thing in the world altogether."¹ Marie-Thérèse, too, seemed absolutely happy. Her sweet nature apparently enthralled the King. When his young wife asked him to give her "this first and only promise," that he would never be away from her unless he was absolutely obliged, he willingly granted her request. Every one who saw the betrothal, the marriage, and the ensuing festivities, carried away an impression of perfect bliss.²

During the long negotiations which preceded the alliance, great things had been happening at the little Court of Blois. Disappointment does not last, at the light-hearted age of the young folk there. New dreams of marriages were soon shaping themselves—marriages with the Prince of England, the Prince of Savoy.

forgotten in the delight of coming to a husband." From an unpublished biography and memoirs : *Extraits des Manuscrits de M. de Vuorden*, p. 129. Paris, 1870.

¹ Mme DE MOTTEVILLE, *Mémoires*, v. IV. p. 217.

² Mlle DE MONTPENSIER, *Mémoires*, v. III. p. 479. See a poem on the accomplishment of Their Majesties' marriage : *Œuvres de Benzerade*, v. I. p. 8. His verses are remarkably free. Their sense agrees perfectly with the reports of Madame de Motteville and Mlle de Montpensier.

On November 27 the young Prince Charles of Lorraine was received there. He was an amiable and graceful youth, only just entering his sixteenth year, but extremely intelligent.¹ In vain did his tutor endeavour to keep him away from his pretty cousins. Madame d'Orléans, delighted to have him with her daughters, yielded to his pleading, and left the young people to themselves—with the result that he fell in love, not with one of the Princesses, but with Mlle de Raré! On this, he was promptly packed off.

Gaston was not to see any of his daughters married. Towards the end of 1659, he failed noticeably. His final ailment carried him off in a few days—aided by the doctors, as one of the Faculty admits.² He died on February 2, 1660, and thereupon followed an incident but too common at the death of princes: the people of the house pillaged even the mortuary-chamber! The brother of Louis XIII., the uncle of Louis XIV., totally deserted, was buried in a borrowed sheet. Only two men stayed by his side. One was Père de Mouchy, the other was Abbé de Rancé, the dead Prince's Almoner. And it was then, while he kept vigil over the body which base servants had stripped almost naked, and pondered the nothingness of human splendour, that the future reformer of La Trappe felt himself die to himself, and become the man whom we shall find, later on, offering holy counsel to Louise de La Vallière, herself transformed into Sister Louise de la Miséricorde.³

But how contradictory things are, here below!

¹ See his first portrait, engraved by Nanteuil: *Serenissimus princeps Carolus a Lotharingia*, Nanteuil *ad vivum faciebat*, 1660.

² GUY-PATIN, *Lettres*, v. II. p. 3, 1707 edition.

³ *La Vie de dom Armand Jean le Bouthillier de Rancé*, . . . by the Abbé DE MARSOLLIER, p. 61, Paris, 1703; Mlle DE MONTPENSIER, v. III. p. 45. Very worldly motives have been assigned for de Rancé's conversion. They are merely libellists' inventions,

Gaston's death, which inspired M. de Rancé with the ideas of conversion and seclusion, was the cause of Louise's ruin, for it sent her out into the world of worldlings.

Gaston's widow, Marguerite of Lorraine, now Dowager-Madame, did not stay long at Blois. "Instead of doing her 'quarantine' in a dark room," like other widows of the time, she departed about the middle of February, leaving her daughters behind for a few days. She was in a hurry to get to Paris and instal herself at the Luxembourg Palace, which was then called the "Orléans." To uphold her claims upon this princely habitation, she was obliged to live, to some extent at any rate, in the grand style. M. de Saint-Remi, "who was so out-of-date," was nevertheless retained as *maître d'hôtel* to the Dowager, and joined her at Paris. In this capacity, he and his family were given rooms in the Palace—thus acquired by that possession which is nine points of the law. Louise de La Vallière and her step-sister therefore continued their companionship with the three Orleans Princesses. Their romantic notions, born of provincial idleness, grew and flourished, more marvellous than ever, in the exciting air of Paris!

But as the family was still in mourning, the early days of the sojourn were relatively quiet. The biggest event of this period was the departure for Saint-Jean-de-Luz of the two younger Princesses. Their elder was spared the mortification of appearing as a subject at a marriage where she had once dreamed of figuring as Queen.¹ One speculates on the thoughts, the talks, of Marguerite and her friend Louise at this time—above all, on the effect produced on the latter by the Royal Entry to Paris, which was a most magnificent affair (August 25, 1660). Every balcony,

¹ Mlle DE MONTPENSIER, v. IV. p. 251.

every window, was crowded. There were the Queens and the Princesses of Orleans, and there, no doubt, was Louise de La Vallière. A young married woman—Madame Scarron, *née* Françoise d'Aubigné—gazed with all her eyes at the pageant; for, despite her obscurity, friends of high degree had got a good place for her. When she came back from the ceremony to the side of her own crippled husband, she wrote her impressions to a friend, and one of the first was: "I don't think any one could possibly be handsomer, and the Queen must go to bed at night rather pleased with the husband she has chosen."¹

Madame Scarron was quite right. Marie-Thérèse *had* chosen her husband; and, young as she was, she was not in the least likely to change her mind. She was naturally upright, and a careful education had engraved on her heart the principles of an inviolable fidelity. She was asked one day if she had ever thought of any young man at the Spanish Court. "How could I possibly?" she replied. "There was no King there."

But can we feel the same faith in a husband of twenty-two, who had not so much chosen a wife as accepted her! Anne of Austria had felt somewhat reassured when, after the wedding-night, her son had thanked her for "having put Marie Mancini out of his head." Louis was sincere when he said that—but he was very young. Marie-Thérèse knew no French; Louis could barely speak Spanish. The young Queen, who had been advised at Madrid to show great reserve, seemed to care for no society but that of her aunt, and the two ladies went piously about, visiting the convents and churches of Paris. At that time, Marie Mancini was living at the Louvre, "with all the rest of the Mazarin lot." For an

¹ MME DE MAINTENON, *Correspondance générale*, v. I. p. 72.

instant it was feared that she might be going to claim the execution of some rash boyish promise. There was gossip. "A recommendation from *la Marie* was worth more than one from the Queen."¹ A few months later, things had gone so far that the young wife felt the first pricks of jealousy, which never again left her. She wept, she complained, and her complaints became public talk. . Fortunately, the Mazarin girl was in the end unmasked—showed herself to be entirely graceless and unprincipled.²

She set her cap at that Prince Charles of Lorraine whom we have already seen at Blois, disturbing the hearts of little Princesses. Marie was quite ready for a flirtation ; she used to meet him in secret—sometimes at the Tuileries, sometimes at church. . . Then, when she had compromised herself hopelessly and lost all prestige in the King's eyes, what should happen but that Prince Charles's own uncle should propose for her himself—only, an intercepted letter proves that the old Duke was merely making a fool of the ambitious young lady !³

The indignant Marie then accepted the suggestion made to her by Mazarin—that ever-ready match-maker !—of marrying the Constable Colonna, though she had at first shown a great repugnance to the idea. The Italian, on his side, took her without even troubling to make her acquaintance. He was satisfied with her fortune of 100,000 *écus* and the beautiful house in Rome which the Cardinal gave her. "The Constable, who," to quote Hortense Mancini, "had never believed that a Royal love-affair *could* be innocent, was so overjoyed to find in my sister a certain proof to the contrary, that he did not complain at all of not being the first

¹ *Extraits des MSS. de Vuorden*, p. 177. Paris, 1870.

² *Mme DE MOTTEVILLE*, v. IV. p. 218.

³ *Mémoires de Beauvau*, p. 185. See Mlle DE MONTPENSIER, v. IV. p. 506.

master of her heart." He was the second, but not the last.¹ This proud object of a Royal passion, this *Maximiliane* of the *Dictionnaire des Précieuses*,² this fantastic consort of a somewhat uncivilised husband, finished her life as a kind of comic-opera heroine, laughed at generally, and worse than laughed at—forgotten.

One would like to give Mazarin credit for the semi-exile of a niece whom he certainly did not love ; but, at the same time, the egotistical man showed himself in a very harsh light towards the young Queen. He fussed over her most trifling expenses, and arranged her household without consulting her in the least. Feeling that his death was inexorably approaching, forgetful of his glory, and thinking only of the imminent dispersion of his great fortune, he now was trying to enlist his relations and friends on his side, by lavishing on them places, incomes, dignities. In this way he forced the Princess Palatine to relinquish her post as Superintendent of the Queen's Household, so that he might instal therein his niece Olympe, who was as antipathetic to the Queen-mother as she was odious to Marie-Thérèse. The Cardinal ended his life badly, with this maleficent arrangement—for Louis had already begun to go again to the Soissons habitation. He enjoyed, as most young men do, the flattery and adulation lavished on him there. But henceforth Olympe Mancini would need no more to await the Royal visits ; she was back at the Louvre, established there definitely—a malignant and destructive influence.

¹ We have two letters from Louis XIV. to the Constable: one of April 12, 1661, where he assures him "that the marriage has been very agreeable to him"; the other of August 6, 1661, where he says: "I have read with great pleasure what you tell me of the feelings she (Marie) still has for me, and of your own share in them" (*Œuvres de Louis XIV.*, v. V. pp. 12, 37).

² *Le Dictionnaire des Précieuses*, v. I. p. 168 of the 1856 edition, by M. Livet. The author of the Dictionary, SAUMAIZE, called himself, in 1661, the Secretary of Mme la Connétable Colonna (*Ibid.* p. 1).

Two days after this last rascality, Mazarin lay on his death-bed at the Castle of Vincennes. Three beds had been put up in a room close to his, where slept Anne of Austria, her son Louis XIV., and the King's nurse. Marie-Thérèse had remained at Paris. In the early morning of March 9, "the King called his nurse, and getting out of bed very very gently, he asked her, by an expressive glance only, if the Cardinal was dead. He did this for fear of awakening the Queen, or troubling her by the sight of death—always an awful and overwhelming spectacle. When he saw that death *had* come, he dressed himself and assembled the Ministers, Chancellor Le Tellier, Superintendent Fouquet, and M. de Brienne. He ordered them to arrange nothing in future without consulting him, and he 'did not desire,' he added, 'that favours should be granted by any one but himself from that time forward.' " His mother, who permitted herself to use the tone of authority that very day, was instantly shown that her son had become her King.

This was the critical moment. Seeds of discord had already been sown at the Louvre that winter, and now the Luxembourg too was going through a stormy period. Mlle de Montpensier was there again, and, just to annoy her step-mother, undertook to amuse and "wake up" her poor little bored sisters. They were young, and they loved dancing. Not so young, but much richer, Mademoiselle had her own private string-band. An impromptu dance was got up in a room as distant from Madame's as possible.¹ Quite naturally, Louise de La Vallière was present at these little parties. Sometimes she

¹ Mademoiselle says that the dances did not begin till a year after Monsieur's death, which took place on Feb. 2, 1660.

even went with Marguerite of Orleans to the Louvre ; but this latter, who was a great novel-reader, quickly wearied of such excursions, and they came back to the fun at Mademoiselle's. Blindman's-buff, hide-and-seek, were among the diversions. "No cards : they were not in fashion. It was a hundred times more fun without them. There were violins, but usually they were stopped, so that they might dance to their own singing."¹ But all sorts of passions were brewing under these innocent amusements—some tardy, others precocious. La Grande Mademoiselle, imperious, resolute, desirous to marry,² but either too lofty for one *parti* or not lofty enough for another, now had set her fancy on that young Charles of Lorraine whom so many people wanted. He was a rather slovenly³ but good-looking boy, a little awkward, though very shapely, and his face was more than pleasing—it was positively fascinating. Whatever she chose to say later on, this damsel of thirty certainly admired the long-lashed eyes and sidelong, feline glances of the seductive young man. It was for him that in reality the balls and suppers were being given. But unfortunately, Mademoiselle's young sister Marguerite, "fair as the day," was there as well ; and Mademoiselle looked like her grandmother.⁴ Charles felt drawn to

¹ *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de Louis XIV.*, by the Abbé de CHOISY, v. I. p. 160 (Utrecht, 1727) ; p. 582, Michaud edition.

² Mlle DE MONTPENSIER, v. III. p. 501 : "Sometimes I wanted very much to get married ; other times I didn't care ; but I loved people to talk about it, always."

³ Mlle DE MONTPENSIER, v. III. p. 498.

⁴ CHOISY, *Mémoires*, p. 671, Michaud Collection. According to Choisy, Mademoiselle saw that Charles was in love with her sister, and cut short all the festivities. This is a mistake. Mademoiselle was not very observant. Her real purpose is clear enough, despite the reticence of her expressions, when once we have the dates for this part of her book. She gave these parties *after* March 2, 1661 ; on February 22, the Duke of Lorraine had made his proposal to her in his nephew's name, and she had said Yes.

Marguerite of Orleans. But she was poor ; her elder was rich. It was to the rich sister that the Prince of Lorraine proposed—or rather, his uncle for him (February 22, 1661).

Romantic Marguerite was deeply wounded ; but she quickly chose her part, and begged her mother to marry her at once to the Duke of Tuscany, before “she had experienced the delights of Court.” The ambassador of the Medici lost no time ; he presented himself at once. Marguerite received him with shrieks of despair ! . . . The following incident will give some idea of the extraordinary life these girls led at the Luxembourg. Louise’s friend was as changeable as she was impulsive. One evening she begged her elder sister to take her to the Grandes-Carmélites, “where,” she said, “she would like to confess.” It was arranged for the next day ; but in came a new novel, Marguerite spent the night reading it, and it is not surprising to learn that she fell asleep in the Convent-church !¹ Nevertheless, she did make a retreat, and had the same cell, very likely, that Louise de La Vallière was to have one day. . . . Suddenly, the poor child was heard weeping wildly : “she would not have the Tuscan Prince ; the King was a tyrant if he tried to force her to.” But when they threatened her with a lasting incarceration at the Convent of Charonne, she grew calmer, went back to the Palace, and started a fresh escapade. Every day, no matter what the weather, she went a-hunting far into the heart of the woods, followed by her cousin Charles, who let his uncle do the wooing of La Grande Mademoiselle for him. Either alone, or very inefficiently escorted, Marguerite would come back at nightfall, with torn hood and tattered garments. “People were astounded—”²

¹ Mlle DE MONTPENSIER, v. III. p. 507.

² Mlle DE MONTPENSIER, v. IV. p. 5 ; *Mémoires de Beauvau*, p. 189.

particularly the Tuscan Ambassador. But he made his request all the same, and on April 18, 1661, Marguerite, whether she liked it or not, was married to the Italian Prince.

It was an evil fate which thrust this deplorable example under Louise de La Vallière's eyes; and not only this, but another more pernicious still. The Lorraine men were, in the contemporary phrase, "of very amorous disposition." Prince Charles's uncle, a Duke without a Duchy, stayed on at Paris trying to make the most of his slender resources, and, above all, to enjoy himself. *His* sort of love-affair plainly indicated his senility. A young woman called Marianne Pajot, the daughter of Mademoiselle's apothecary and the niece of one of Madame's lady's-maids, was then living with her aunt at the Luxembourg. The old Duke fell in love with her, invited himself to the aunt's house, took the niece out for airings, and his doddering passion enlisted an astonishing ally. Marguerite of Orleans (not yet married), learning that the Duke of Lorraine wanted to marry Charles to her elder sister, went and flung herself at his feet, imploring him to abandon the project, to give Charles to her. "My sister is proud and arrogant. *She* will never let you marry Marianne; but *I*—I will live with you as the meanest of my women-servants might have done, if you had allowed your nephew to marry her; *I* will love, *I* will look up to Marianne!"¹

M. de Lorraine answered merely, "You are a little fool!"—and continued to provide the Luxembourg with gossip about his own "fooleries" with the Pajot girl.

Louise de La Vallière was then sixteen and a half.

¹ Mlle DE MONTPENSIER, v. III, p. 519. See D'HAUSSONVILLE, *Histoire de la réunion de la Lorraine à France*, III, 164; 1857 edition.

We are at the end of March, 1661. It is little more than a year since her arrival in Paris. The reader will have guessed at her employments, during this transition-period, from the little details which we have supplied: eager explorings of the great city, wonder at the glories of the Royal Wedding Procession, glimpses of the inner life of the Louvre, little parties¹ at Mademoiselle's, where she met the gentlemen of the Court. . . If Marguerite of Orleans read new novels all night, her companion doubtless got hold of them in the daytime. It was the hour of awakening curiosity—that perilous hour, so often closely followed by the temptation, and then by the trial of strength.

Mazarin, as we have seen, died on March 9, and was forgotten before he was cold in the grave. People felt that they could breathe more freely. . . The month of April, 1661, was fruitful in events. Its opening day saw the marriage of Monsieur, the King's brother, with the Princess Henrietta, daughter of Charles I. of England. Philippe received as apanage part of the late Gaston's estate. Gaston's widow was now only the Dowager-Madame. Gradually all her former adherents were slipping away from her. There was talk of the Saint-Remis and La Vallières returning to Touraine or to the Blois country. But no! that Goddess of Chance who had brought Louise from the heart of the provinces to the very Louvre itself, was now to thrust her still deeper into the adventurous life of the Court.

A famous *précieuse* of the time, Madame de

¹ Mademoiselle de Montpensier tells much that has hitherto been little used about this transition-period of Louise's life. The small dances took place a year after Gaston's death, say, in February. About March 18th (Saint Joseph's Eve) Mademoiselle d'Orléans was promised in marriage to the Duke of Savoy. She says that La Vallière was then fifteen (v. III. p. 496). We know that she had been sixteen on August 6, 1660.

Choisy, wife of the Ex-Chancellor of Gaston of Orleans, lived in one of the much-coveted sets of apartments at the Luxembourg. Witty rather than cultured, and fond of society, she was approaching the age when *galanterie* gives way to the excitement of intrigue. As was the fashion of the time, this lady wrote her own pen-portrait, and, like most painters, flattered herself a little. "Great assemblies and brilliant society do not make me nervous," she affirmed; "on the contrary, I seem born for that kind of thing. The greatest pleasure I know is to do good turns for other people: nothing makes me so happy. Naturally, with these characteristics, I do not lead a notably tranquil life!"¹

In simple language, this means that our Norman lady (for she came from Caen) had a mania for interfering in other people's affairs. Deeply versed in Court gossip, she kept up correspondences with the Queens of Poland and Sweden, and with Madame Royale of Savoy. "She had no idea of spelling; but, when one knew her peculiar style well enough to savour it, one found it full of admirable phrases, and very vivacious indeed."² She was notably daring, and one day she said to Louis XIV.: "Sire, if you want to become an interesting man, you must often come and talk with me." He took her advice, gave her audiences regularly twice a week, and paid for them, later on, with a pension. In short, if we are to believe him—and many others—Madame de Choisy was a very strong-minded and superior person indeed.

¹ *La Galerie des Portraits de Mademoiselle*, E. de Barthélemy's edition, p. 265. We have no hesitation in attributing to Mme de Choisy the "portrait of a lady of position in the town of Caen, done by herself." Mme de Choisy, *née* Hurault de l'Hôpital, had married a Councillor of the Parliament.

² TALLEMANT DES RÉAUX, *Historiettes*, v. VI. p. 27. Segrais, who was a countryman of the lady's, says in his *Mémoires* that "she talked and wrote divinely" (*Mémoires-Anecdotes*, p. 27, 1755 edition).

Now it happened that this enterprising lady had taken particular notice of "little" La Vallière, who sometimes played with her son in the Luxembourg gardens ; and, as she wished to establish relations with the new Madame—now the rising star—and as that lady's household was still in process of formation, she presented her fair *protégée*, and succeeded in getting her appointed maid-of-honour.

A maid-of-honour ! What visions the words evoke—what dreams of splendour ! To be a gem in that crown of innocence or virtue which etiquette assigns to Queens and Princesses ; to stand, like the modest forget-me-not, one of the flowering circle around the Queen-Rose ! What fate more enviable than to serve the Queen, to serve Madame, to stand by the source of all grace, the object of all homage ! . . . And yet—the rose had its thorns. Madame was not perfect ; one suffered from little tempers. If she were wakeful, the maid-of-honour was instantly summoned, and had to read the latest romance aloud until slumber was kind. Another time there was great excitement about some ball : every one was ready, all was arranged, when Madame has a tiff with Monsieur, and stays at home, and all the ladies, of course, have to stay at home, too ! . . . Moreover, one was criticised, women were jealous, men too assiduous. The Court-gallants often behaved very insolently to these poor girls. Anne of Austria made strenuous efforts to keep her giddy little troop in order ; Marie-Thérèse had entrusted the chaperonage of hers to a lady of high repute, the Maréchale de Navailles. But how was Madame going to rule her household—the new Madame, First Lady in France, aged sixteen ? Heaven alone could tell !

All these considerations, however, were as nothing to another and more practical one, which for the Saint-Remis, poor as church-mice, assumed a more immediate importance.

The post of maid-of-honour carried with it some real advantages. The tiny salary of a hundred *livres* (about five or six hundred francs nowadays) was scarcely enough to dress on ; but it was safe, and there was a better chance for a portionless girl of picking up a husband at Court than anywhere else. A Princess, too, would frequently do a little kindly match-making, helping matters on with small presents, small favours,¹ and Louise's parents caught all the more eagerly at the opportunity because they now had another daughter, which, with the two born of their preceding marriages, left them with three girls to establish.

On March 28, 1661, Jean-François de La Baume Le Blanc, Knight, Lord of La Vallière, and *damoiselle* Louise-Françoise, brother and sister, and of full age, declared to Juge Michel Guillois that "they were in need of some moneys to fit themselves out—that is to say, for the gentleman, to serve the King, and for the lady, to go as maid-of-honour to the future Madame."

As far as Louise was concerned, it was absolutely true. But her brother's declaration that he was going to serve His Majesty was distinctly over-

¹ This passage was written before I came across the little book entitled *L'Amante Convertie, ou l'Illustre Pénitente*, an anonymous account of the conversion of La Vallière. On page 13 (1684 edition) we read: "Those parents to whom, in His inscrutable providence, God has given noble birth and an ignoble fortune, are usually convinced that the only way to improve their daughters' position is to send them to Court. It is true that these posts are dazzling, and desirable in that they seem to hold out hopes of kindly intervention which is unprocurable elsewhere. But assuredly they expose their occupants to great dangers,"

emphasised. He served His Majesty merely as a soldier serves his captain.

But we must not be too severe on a young man's vanity. . . The brother and sister confessed that no one would lend them a penny "because of their youth, without first consulting their parents and friends." This was what had decided them to summon before Guillois Messire François de Beauvau, Knight, Marquis of Beauvau, and Messire Henry de Boivin, Lord of Vauroy, their cousins-german.

The committee consented "to the borrowing by *dame* Françoise Le Provost of the necessary sum of money for the use and affairs of the said gentleman and lady, her children, either by a charge on her income, a bond, or otherwise, on the security of the Sieur de Courtarvel." Michel Guillois referred to the Court of Justice, which confirmed the decision.

We have none of the documents which ensued from this arrangement ; but plainly it was by borrowing that Jean-François and his sister Louise began their careers—one leading to the barracks of the Dauphin's Light Horse, the other to the brilliant Court of the future Madame.

The girl entered upon hers light-heartedly. Her family had no hold upon her. How delightful, indeed, to escape from the severe looks of the Dowager-Madame and the patronising kindness of La Grande Mademoiselle ; to go to the Tuileries, not as the obscure servitor of a Princess destined to be exiled from France, but as maid-of-honour to Madame, the King's own sister-in-law ! To go to Court—what a vision for girlish eyes, which see everything in rose-colour !

From that Luxembourg Palace where Chance had placed her, the young creature could, as it were, behold the two destinies which awaited her. On one

side she saw above the house-tops—then few and lowly—Paris, the city of delights, the Louvre, the Tuileries. On the other—and the contrast was remarkable—all she could see were ecclesiastical buildings and austere convents. Close to the Palace Garden, so close that they looked like one, was the courtyard of the Carthusian monks ; farther, lay Val-de-Grâce ; between the two stood a Convent of rigidly secluded nuns, leading lives so hard and joyless that gay worldlings shuddered at the very thought of them—the nuns of the Order of the Grandes-Carmélites.

Louise de La Vallière began her service at the Tuileries in the midst of the marriage-festivities—that month when everything is honeyed, even for princes. All the notabilities of the Court were there. Monsieur—as yet unrevealed—seemed amiable, witty, gentle, with a gracious word for all. Of middle height, but well-made, he was “*très joli*”—agreeable enough, at any rate, to charm a young Princess for a month. This Princess, the daughter of Charles I. of England, had spent her early life first in a kind of captivity, then in a kind of exile. Warm-hearted Anne of Austria had taken her under her protection ; but a life which needs that sort of protection is always a little deplorable. Then, quite unexpectedly, even suddenly, dazzling good-fortune had succeeded the dark hours. The Restoration of Charles II. was the beginning, and after that, Henrietta’s sky seemed cloudless.

Louise de La Vallière, naturally present at all the festivities, and expected to adorn them, succeeded notably, and was elated with her innocent triumphs. She was considered “*extremely pretty, gentle, natural* : ” a veritable little floweret, half-hidden, but betrayed

by its own sweetness, and somewhat frightened by the dazzling blaze of publicity. Yet this humble violet was to be transported to the full splendour of the Royal Court itself, there to bloom beneath the gaze of him who was soon to be known as the "Roi Soleil."

CHAPTER III

APRIL, 1661—NOVEMBER, 1661

BY the time Madame Henriette had finally put her house in order—or rather, had it put in order for her—it was almost the end of March. On April 19, she left Paris and rejoined the Court at Fontainebleau. Louise de La Vallière was plunged, without any transition-period, into a new life. She came into it quite alone. Her mother and her step-father, Saint-Remi—simple folk with still two daughters and a son to take care of—remained at the Luxembourg. Louise was to have for her only intimate friend another maid-of-honour, Anne Constance de Montalais, an intriguing and dangerous adviser. The child of sixteen was thus thrust into dangers of every kind, having, as sole guardian, a mistress of the same age as herself, quite as inexperienced but far more reckless, and greedily desirous of worldly success.

While Louis was still able only to take an interest in grown-up girls—that is to say, in the beautiful and daring ones—he had shown much antipathy to the English Princess. Readers will recall the little scene which took place at a ball in the winter of 1655. The King was afraid that they would wish him to marry his cousin. Once married, his hostility showed itself again in remarks which his politeness of later years would have condemned—in asking his brother, for example,

why he was in such a hurry to marry "the Bones of Holy Innocents." Imagine, then, his surprise when he saw Henrietta again in the glorious summer of 1661: the young girl, grown to womanhood, completely transformed, completely transfigured! A beauty of sixteen, full of all the grace of youth, with a brilliant, delicate, subtle wit, had blossomed like a flower, in one day. Madame felt herself on good terms with the whole world, and willingly gave back love for love. Her black eyes sparkled, "full of a magnetic fire which no man could resist"; those eyes which, in the words of a contemporary, "seemed filled with the desire to please, and which each man believed shone for him only. The King realised, in this closer inspection of her, how utterly blind he had been not to think her the most beautiful person in the world. He became strongly attached to her, and showed her every manner of kindness."

For her part, Madame remembered, with some considerable vexation, that the King had despised her when she might have married him; and it was with a spice of malice that she saw how very different were the feelings which he seemed to have for her now. She did not take long to conquer the disdainful monarch. Less than a fortnight after her arrival at Fontainebleau, "she was arranging all the entertainments. They were got up for her, and the King cared only for those which she enjoyed."

"It was the middle of summer; Madame went out bathing every day. She started in a carriage, on account of the heat, and returned on horseback, followed by all the ladies, elegantly dressed, with wonderful feathers on their heads, and accompanied by the King and all the gallants of the Court. After supper they got into little carriages and drove, to the sound of violins, along the grassy banks of the canal. These woodland

drives lasted until two or three o'clock in the morning, and undoubtedly had an air of great impropriety." The *Gazette de France* had scarcely room enough to chronicle the long series of festivities. On May 8 the King gave a water-fête for Madame, "in galiots, with flourishes of trumpets." After the excursion, a wonderful collation. The same day la Grande Mademoiselle arrived, and also the new Princess of Tuscany, Marguerite d'Orléans, that friend of Louise de La Vallière, who, in her salad-days, had begged that she might be married before she could learn the delights of Court-life. She saw it, then in full splendour. Indeed, on the evening of her arrival, there was a boating-party on the canal, as well as a performance at the Comédie-Française. On the next day the King, Monsieur, and Madame went to visit Mademoiselle; in the evening there was a ball. There Louise de La Vallière met her young friend again, and found her, who used to be so gay, deeply dejected at having rushed into the arms of an unknown husband, thereby losing for ever her cousin, Charles of Lorraine! Thoroughly discontented, the Princess had no social charm, so she was forgotten the moment she was gone. She left next day. In the morning there was a hunting-party, in the evening boating on the canal, with the most delicious concert taking place all the time. This was such a success that two days afterwards Baptiste Lulli, "a Florentine gentleman," was honoured with the title of "Superintendent and Composer of Music to the King"; while Lambert, another musical celebrity, was appointed "Master of the same Music." Then the trumpets were replaced by thirty-six violins, of all instruments the most amorous.

On the 22nd, there was an excursion to the Hermitage, the most beautiful part of the forest,



After the engraving by Larressin

LOUISE DE LA VALLIÈRE.

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where "a magnificent collation was served for the Queens, Madame, and the other Princesses and maids-of-honour of the Royal Household." This piece of *Gazette* news is chronologically valuable. The maids-of-honour were beginning to attract attention. Several of them were very pretty. There is an engraving from a portrait of Louise de La Vallière in a costume of about this date. She is beautifully dressed, with waving feathers in her hair. The face is smiling, brilliant, happy. Youth delights in pleasure, and pleasure was the breath of life at that time. On the 25th, Monsieur gave a ball; on the 27th, a hunting-party, where all the ladies were in very "light" carriages. "Light," in all its ambiguous significance, was then the fashionable word! Hitherto one had thought of the Court of the great King as a scene of pompous and magnificent etiquette; but, on the contrary, it seems that nothing was thought worth while there unless it was somewhat indecorous.

The month of June, except for some storms, was even more magnificent than the month of May. On May 30th, Monsieur and Madame had to go to Colombes, where the Queen of England was, but they returned on June 2. Louis was in such a hurry to see Madame again that he went as far as the Hermitage to meet her. The next day he opened the ball with his sister-in-law. On the 11th, an excursion, with all the ladies on horseback; in the evening a ball, given by Monsieur. On the 14th, an open-air ball, given by the Duke of Beaufort. On the 18th an entertainment organised by the Duc de Saint-Aignan. On the 25th, one given by the Duc d'Enghien, and on the evening of the same day, a torchlight procession!

When they did not go out, they rehearsed a ballet by Benserade. The young people were inspired to

give another ballet, in which the dances were on horseback, to the light of torches. In that also the King and Madame played the principal parts. So, by the end of a month, there was no longer any question of Louis' attachment to his sister-in-law, "and it seemed to every one that there existed between them the kind of feeling that leads up to a great passion."¹

Something too much of this merry-making, thought the Queen-mother! And the young Queen was beginning to complain of all these amusements, which took the King away from her. She would have liked to follow him everywhere, but that, of course, she could not do. Anne of Austria, in spite of her own ideas, gently reprimanded her daughter-in-law for this dawning jealousy. In reality, more uneasy herself than Marie-Thérèse, because she knew more of her son and of the world, she tried to get the Court back to Paris, under pretence of spending the time of Jubilee piously there. Needless to say, her advice was disregarded. Then she intimated to Madame that so many dances and midnight excursions were injurious to her health. After this prudent advice, she went on to more direct remonstrances, and was received with as little attention as before. Absorbed in the delight of having brought the King to her feet, the Princess did not bother herself much about propriety. She simply indulged in everything from which she could derive any amusement, so long

¹ *Histoire de Madame Henriette*. A letter found when they seized Fouquet's casket confirms this story of Mme de La Fayette's. See CHÉRUEL, *Mémoires sur Fouquet*, v. II. p. 112. See also a pamphlet of the time, *Il Mercurio Postiglione di questo e l'altro mondo*, in Villa-Franca, *appresso* Claudio del Monte, 1667, p. 69. The *Postiglione* was translated into a kind of French, at Liège (Claude Guibert, *s.d.*). It seems to have appeared before the death of the Queen-mother, towards the end of 1665. A picture (reproduced here) belongs to this period.

as it did not appear to her to be absolutely criminal, or entirely against her duty.

On June 27, the Queen-mother, "in order to put some stop to these excursions," took Madame to Villeroy, then to Dampierre, the residence of the Duchesse de Chevreuse.¹ The King accompanied his sister-in-law for fourteen miles of the way, and on her return showed the same enthusiasm. Then Anne of Austria began to speak more plainly. Monsieur also interfered, and Henrietta's mother was sent for. They all spoke "so strongly to the King and to Madame, that at last their eyes were opened," and they decided to put an end to these scandalous rumours "at any cost." They arranged between themselves that the King should make love to somebody belonging to the Court, "and, looking around at all the ladies and young girls who seemed most suitable for the purpose," they selected Mlle de Pons and Mlle de Chimerault, two of the Queen's maids—bold coquettes both!—and finally, Louise de La Vallière. It was towards the end of the first week of July that this plot was woven.

In such a way was the innocent girl given up to be the sport of the Court—and given up by that Princess, a married woman, who was the guardian of her honour, yet who now used her as the merest tool! What can be said, except that Henrietta was the same age as her young attendant—that hard, crude age, which knows no more of pity than of discretion?

¹ Mme DE MOTTEVILLE, v. IV. p. 278. *Gazette de France*, June 27 and 30, 1661. On July 4, the woman Laloy informed Fouquet of the arrival of the Queen of England, and the object of her visit. On the 7th, she added that it was "to speak to Madame about the King, and it is the Queen-mother who arranged it all" (CHÉRUVEL, *Mémoires sur Fouquet*, v. II. p. 183).

As soon as it was conceived, this plan was carried out. First of all, Mlle de Pons—of doubtful virtue!—escaped, in spite of herself, from the mock intrigue. Under pretence that her relative, the Maréchal d'Albret, was ill, they hurried her off to Paris. The King, who already knew so much, discovered the fresh trick. He was very angry, and quickly intimated that he did not intend to have his wishes opposed in future.¹

Mlle de Chimerault, cleverer and more expert in the Gentle Art of Coquetry, welcomed the King's attack, and replied to it; but, as this siege was only a ruse, it was languidly conducted.

There remained Louise de La Vallière. She had scarcely reached the age of seventeen, was tall, with a slim figure, rather thin, of that lissom slenderness, "like a young tree's" which belongs to extreme youth. Her detractors, for she soon had many, thought her insignificant, and said she did not carry herself well; but a woman, usually very severe, and who did not like her, Mademoiselle de Montpensier, confessed that "though she was a little lame, she danced well." "She limped slightly," says another woman-writer, "but it was not unbecoming to her."² In riding-dress, "she looked intensely graceful." A charming head crowned this healthy young form. Her only bad point was her teeth, which were not beautiful; but her complexion was very fair;³ her blue eyes⁴

¹ Mme DE MOTTEVILLE, *Mémoires*, v. IV. p. 279. It will be found, in Mme de Motteville's *Mémoires*, that the forced departure of Mlle de Pons took place after June 27, after the arrival of the Queen of England at Fontainebleau, and before July 16, the date of the dismissal of the Comte de Guiche. See *Ibid.* p. 281. See also the *Mémoires de Madame de Caylus*, p. 130, Rounié edition.

² *Correspondance de la Princesse Palatine*. Of course the Princess Palatine only saw La Vallière in later years.

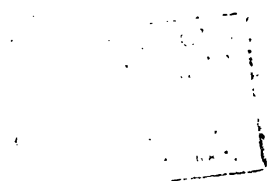
³ Mme DE MOTTEVILLE, *l.c.*; *Histoire amoureuse des Gaules*. The latter volume says "marked with small-pox."

⁴ The author of the *Histoire amoureuse* gives her brown eyes; but he must have been colour-blind, for Mlle de Montpensier, the Princess Palatine, and the Abbé Choisy all give her blue.



From an engraving after a miniature by Petitot.

LOUISE DE LA VALLIÈRE.



had an indescribable charm—"they were soft and full of expression." Hair of a silvery fairness framed her beautiful face. The sound of her voice, extraordinarily sweet, lingered in one's ears, and those who heard it never forgot it. A clever word-painter completes this portrait by a touch which entirely expresses her: "She was not," he said, "one of those perfect beauties whom one often admires without loving. She was intensely lovable, and that line of La Fontaine:

'Et la grâce, plus belle encor que la beauté,'

might have been written for her."

Meanwhile Madame Henriette, quite confident in her own all-conquering attractions, tasting in advance the delights of an assured success, and living in a state of continual excitement, had not noticed the delicate charm and persuasive beauty of her maid-of-honour. Louis was to be no less surprised than his sister-in-law. The Mancini girls had shown him passion—but aggressive, authoritative, tyrannical passion. Henrietta, though more graciously, affected the same imperious airs. What a contrast, then, was Louise in her sweetness, sincerity, and innocence!

Scarcely two months had gone by since her arrival at Court, but they were two months in which the days were counted only by the number of gaieties in each. In Paris, life in the different palaces easily allowed a few hours for rest and reflection. But at Fontainebleau, they lived almost from morning till night in a state of whirl. And more disturbing still to a young imagination was the fact that every excursion led up to a new outburst of love-making! The King was Madame's cavalier, while the maids-of-honour had for their admirers all the finest flower of the Court. This "little" La Vallière, whom formerly they had regarded as scarcely having a claim

to the title of *demoiselle*, was now receiving the homage of the most illustrious nobles. "Every one thought her lovely. Several young men made love to her"; and, amongst others, the Comte de Guiche. In short, Louise had been living for three months in a romantic atmosphere, eminently calculated to inspire wonderful dreams—dreams which were soon, however, to be entirely surpassed by the reality.

We need not go back so far as the King's visit to Blois. Louise had often seen him since her return to Paris, especially when she accompanied Marguerite of Orleans to the Louvre. Now she saw him every day—polished, eager, desirous of making a good impression, though speaking very little, and never quite losing the royal air. He was a great dandy, yet he looked like a hero. His slightly disdainful lips only gave more value to his words, and his glance was piercing.¹ One might easily have taken him for one of the Kings of Romance, for one of those Princes in the *Astræa*, who married shepherdesses. . . Now, Louise de La Vallière had read deeply of Romance.

Louis, following out his arrangement with Madame, began acting his part towards the girl; but the actor disappeared when the King experienced that sensation, hitherto unknown (for, having married too young, he did not sufficiently appreciate the deep affection of his wife), of being loved "for himself."

Of all that has been narrated of confidences among the Maids, of shy confessions before the statue of Diana, and the overhearing of them by the surprised and delighted Prince, we have no account except from very suspect chroniclers.² That Louise loved him

¹ See a portrait, both drawn and engraved by Nanteuil in 1661. The features are not too much accentuated in it. See also several drawings by Le Brun which are in the Louvre.

² We do not possess the original editions of these pamphlets. We can indicate their value, however, by saying that they make Versailles

quite spontaneously, and gave him a heart as frank as it was true, we cannot doubt. Assuredly such an innocent child did not offer her love unsought. Perhaps she might even have kept her secret for ever if the King's own declaration had not brought forth her avowal.

Real feeling soon carried him away from all make-believe. To follow out correctly the plan arranged between himself and Madame, the King ought to have made a display of his success; but, feeling himself charmed, the charmer began to dissemble. The deeper the affair went, the more reserved he became. He was not seen with the girl at the house of her mistress, nor during the morning-excursions, but in the evenings "he would get out of Madame's carriage and go to that of La Vallière, of which the door was shut; and, as it was night, and dark, he could speak to her with much less reserve." Had they then no meetings in the day-time? That would be difficult to believe. We have accounts of more than one, the work perhaps of inventive minds, but they indicate how the popular imagination figured to itself these interviews between a Prince and a "Shepherdess." The Prince was always polished, insinuating, like one of Madame de Scudéry's heroes. Louise is represented as more natural, often enough with an air of sorrowful melancholy: "'Alas!'" said the King, 'I speak as a happy man—a thing that perhaps in all my life I shall never be!' 'I do not know what you may be,' replied La Vallière, 'but I know well that if this trouble in my heart continues, I can scarcely know happiness.'"

Then rain would fall suddenly. . . The King sheltered the girlish head with his own hat, and brought

the scene of the seduction. The authentic account, to which we pin our faith, is Mme de La Fayette's story, confirmed by Mlle de Montpensier's *Mémoires*, v. III. p. 527. See also *L'Illustré Pénitente*, p. 22.

her back to the Palace, braving the jealous eyes of the Court. "The unrest of love appeared only upon his face; on that of La Vallière one saw a deep sorrow."

In reading accounts, even contemporary ones, of this Royal romance, it would seem that it lasted for several months; yet history gives it scarcely two short weeks. It was the day after the representation of the ballet called *L'Impatience*; these verses had been sung:

"Sommes-nous pas trop heureux
Belle Iris, que vous en semble?
Nous voici tous deux ensemble,
Et nous nous parlons tous deux;
La nuit de ses sombres voiles
Couvre nos désirs ardents
Et l'amour et les étoiles
Sont nos secrets confidens.

"Mon cœur est sous votre loi
Et n'en peut aimer une autre;
Laissez-moi voir dans le vostre
Ce qui s'y passe pour moi.
La nuit est calme et profonde,
Nul ne vient mal à propos,
Le repos de tout le monde
Assure nostre repos."¹

And Benserade's advice was being put into practice.

The King occupied, at Fontainebleau, the State apartments situated on the left side of the Court, in the Oval. On the same side, and in the Pavilion called "the Prince's," at the entrance to the same courtyard, were the apartments belonging to Monsieur, the King's brother, to Madame Henriette, and to her maids-of-honour. This pavilion, built by Henri IV., showed a special character as regards its interior decoration. While the Pagan art of the Renaissance reigned supreme throughout the rest of the castle, there

¹ *Œuvres de Benserade* v. II. p. 238, Paris edition. Although the ballet *L'Impatience* is printed after that of the *Saisons*, it ought to be placed first, having been represented in 1651. See *La Muse historique*, v. III. p. 322.

was here a singular mixture of subjects. Beside Jupiter abducting Europa or talking with Calisto, one saw Eve giving the apple to Adam, and, further on, the married pair driven out of the Earthly Paradise.¹

It was not the Biblical pictures which made most impression upon the young people of 1661.

It is the absolute rule in poetry, when it treats of passionate heroes and sincere, true-hearted women, to lead away the lovers, at the moment of decision, into mysterious groves, on one of those days when the infuriated elements seem resolved upon their ruin.

More than one biographer of Louise de La Vallière has attempted to shelter her, at the moment of trial, under such a Virgilian setting. It is a foolish and dangerous artifice. Nothing more truly deserves pardon than the candid confession of a fault. Always—and it is its earliest bitterness—illicit love is forced to assume a vulgar form, and Louis XIV. had to submit to this universal law.

He had then a favourite, the Comte de Saint-Aignan—a curious person, who pretended to be a young man, but was nearly forty, the father of three big boys, and three daughters who were abbesses. A witty fellow, a poet on occasion,² and gallant always, he had won the favour of the young King by a complaisance unworthy of his position, and above all of his age. It is worth noting that Saint-Aignan had made part of the military household of Gaston of Orleans, so all the little world of Blois was quite

¹ GUILBERT, *Descriptions de Fontainebleau*, v. II. p. 77.

² Saint-Aignan had a piece of verse in honour of the Virgin, crowned at the Palinode of Caen in 1667. He was a member of the French Academy of 1663. *Histoire de l'Académie française*, by D'OLIVET, p. 161, Amsterdam edition, 1730. See *Mémoires de René Rapin*, v. III. p. 382.

familiar to him. He had since been made Governor of Touraine. He was, to put it prettily, the Medium of Fate. At that time, in his office of First Gentleman of the Chamber, he occupied one of those small rooms in the Palace which contrast so strangely with the magnificence of the State Apartments. . . *Saint-Aignan lent his room.*¹

We have come to a threshold which we may not cross ; but, glancing over that irretrievable past and that vanished innocence, we are obliged to state that resistance was short, and victory speedy.

Louise, arriving at Fontainebleau in May, became, before the end of July, the mistress of the King. Once more we come to the day after the ballet of *L'Impatience* :

"Courons où tendent nos désirs ;
Il n'est pas toujours temps de goûter les plaisirs ;
On ne peut en avoir trop tôt la jouissance :
Il faut presser pour estre heureux,
Et l'amour est sans traits, et l'amour est sans feux
Quand il est sans impatience."

The Queen-mother, having entirely given up all political activity, was watching her son. She ascertained first—and it caused her great uneasiness—that he had relaxed very much in attention to religion, that he neither confessed nor communicated so often as he had been used to do.² The familiarity between Louis and Henrietta blinded her to the real danger. By the time she heard of the King's liaison with Louise de La Vallière, a little before July 20, the mischief was done. Then she reproached her niece

¹ *Histoire de Madame*, p. 70, edition 1742.

² Letter of July 20, 1661, addressed to Fouquet by one of his spies, whom M. Chéruel supposes to have been the Abbé de Bel-Esbat. *Mémoires sur Fouquet*, v. II. p. 169.

for not having objected to the attention which the King was paying "to that girl." She next attacked Monsieur, who took it as "a personal affront that the King should be in love with one of Madame's maids." Madame, in these changeable times, had done nothing to bring back her lover. If in the bottom of her heart she felt some anger, it was (all women are alike in this!) not against the man who had left her, but against the poor girl whom she had, to some extent, forced upon her fate. For the moment, since she had already entered upon a new intrigue, nothing annoyed her more than being lectured. She had counted among the greatest advantages to be gained by marriage, the cessation of her mother's interference. That of her mother-in-law was simply intolerable, and her replies showed her irritation.

Anne of Austria then spoke directly to her son. She put before him his duty towards God and the State; told him the risks—the probability that many people would use this attachment to make plots against him, even to injure him in the future. She begged him also to help her to conceal his passion from the Queen, whose health demanded every consideration. Louis paid attention to the second piece of advice, but considered the first quite superfluous. He was persuaded that he understood perfectly how to reconcile his caprices with his duties.¹

Mazarin had instructed him deeply on this subject,

¹ In the *Recueil de pièces galantes en prose et en vers de Madame la comtesse de la Suze et de Monsieur Péliisson, etc.*, published in 1696 (Paris, Cavalier), is to be found a dialogue, *Ergasis et Édone, ou le Travail et la Volupté*. The little piece deals with a curious theory upon this very subject. Ergasis says to Édone: "Do not be too elated by the fact that this great Prince of whom you speak pays you many visits, and realise that it is only as a sort of refreshment after the weariness he must feel in ruling quite alone. He is of an age when he cannot be expected to avoid you; but remember that, after all, he will not be pleased if you inspire his subjects with feelings so far removed from those which they ought to have,"

and, Mazarin being dead, the King was all the more willing to follow his maxims.¹

Louise's mother did not appear. A contemporary song represents her as a calculating fiend.² These horrible imputations would not be worth noticing if her ulterior behaviour did not give a certain appearance of truth to them. The step-father, M. de Saint-Remi, a simple fellow, born to be gulled, had not a very clear head, as the sequel will show.³ The best we can say for these unworthy parents is that, living as they did at the Luxembourg, they were ignorant of much that went on at Fontainebleau. Moreover, everybody kept silent before the King. But if the advice and admonition of a mother were lacking to Louise de La Vallière, remorse spoke quickly enough, never ceasing to cry out (as she herself has said) in the midst of her most glorious moments. To remorse was added, from the very first, those social pin-pricks which are so much the more cruel because it is a point of honour not to appear to notice them.

Among the young men who surrounded Louise with homage was Loménie de Brienne, a nice boy, perhaps a little foppish, but utterly incapable of intentionally causing pain to anybody. He was always saying pretty things to the girl, and believed himself to be favourably listened to—unconscious, poor boy, that he was thus posing as a rival to his King.⁴ An

¹ M. Clément has only been able to find a fragment of these precepts, but the libellists of that time knew of them, at all events, by hearsay. See *Il Mercurio Postiglione*, p. 118.

² *Recueil de Maurepas*, v. I. See also *L'Illustre Pénitente*, p. 20 (Mons, 1578): "A mother more ambitious for her daughter than anxious to preserve her innocence."

³ *Mémoires de Beauvau*, p. 220. Saint-Remi is badly enough spoken of in the *Mémoires de Goulas*, v. II. p. 134.

⁴ The adventure of which we are going to speak is dated by what Brienne *père* said to his son; the Queen-mother had spoken to him a fortnight before of the love-affair between the King and La Vallière (*Mémoires de Brienne*, v. II. p. 170).

artist had just been summoned by him from Venice—one Le Febvre, of French origin, though he usually lived abroad. This painter was in much request for medium-sized portraits, representing lords and ladies as gods or goddesses, or in the dress of their patron-saints.¹ Tempted by the occasion, the audacious Brienne suggested to Louise de La Vallière that she should be painted as Magdalen. He was singularly unfortunate, for while he was laying this scheme before the maid-of-honour, still supposedly a virtuous young lady, the King passed by. Brienne began innocently to develop his plan, by remarking to Louis upon her beauty. Louise blushed, and the King moved on without replying. But that very evening, Brienne saw him talking excitedly to his new mistress in the embrasure of a window. Realising his blunder of the morning, and trying to repair it, he asked Mlle de La Vallière if she still consented to be painted as Magdalen. Louis, who overheard him, came back: "No, she is too young to be painted as a penitent; she must be painted as Diana."

Brienne could not sleep all night after this shock. Next day he went to the King, who took him into the room called "Théagène and Chariclée,"² locked the door, then, turning towards the astonished and uneasy courtier: "Do you love her, Brienne?" he asked politely but severely, without even mentioning Louise. "Who, sir? Mlle de La Vallière?" "Yes, it is of her I speak." Then Brienne began to excuse himself, to confess that he felt some affection for the

¹ Le Febvre painted Madame as Venus, properly accompanied by Cupid. But in the distance was to be seen Adonis, hunting! (BRIENNE, *Mémoires*, v. II, p. 171).

² A State-room of the King's, so called because of a series of tableaux by Dubois representing the adventures of Théagène and Chariclée. See GUILBERT, *Description historique de Fontainebleau*, v. I. p. 137.

girl ; at last, losing his head, he declared that he was married. Louis, without paying any attention to this astonishing excuse (he could think of nothing but his love), said vehemently : "Brienne, you do love her ! why do you lie ?" "Ah ! sire, she pleases you even more—you love her." "Whether I do or not, leave her portrait alone, and you will please me." Louise de La Vallière was nevertheless represented as Diana, and the painter put Actæon in the picture. "And poor Actæon !" said Brienne—"that was I—an innocent piece of spite thought out by the King !"¹

Guiche, son of the Maréchal de Grammont, was less accommodating than Brienne. Of all the young men at Court, he was the most attractive, the wittiest ; brave, already bearing honourable scars ;² a little vain unfortunately, and with a disdainful air, which somewhat spoilt his charms. He had been married too young to a charming wife, and affected to despise her. At this time he was honouring La Vallière with his attentions. People began to ask if Guiche was the sort of man to tolerate a rival. This is astonishing ; but it must be attributed to the juvenility of Louis, and to the fact that he, together with this same Guiche, had been brought up quite familiarly with Tréville, Rohan, Lesdiguières, and Brienne. These young men, finding their comrade not quite so lively

¹ There was once to be seen, at the Castle of Bures (Seine et Oise), a picture after the style of Le Febvre. It represented a young woman as Diana. In the background was Love pointing out Actæon to some nymphs. Diana's coiffure seems to indicate a time twenty or twenty-five years further on than that which we are occupied with ; but this is not sufficient to establish that the picture was not painted in 1661 ; it might have been a fancy-coiffure afterwards adopted by fashion. Assuredly we do not mean to identify the Diana of Bures with the Diana of Fontainebleau. It is worth noting, however, that, according to one tradition, it is a portrait of the Princesse de Conti.

² He had received a terrible wound on the hand,



From an engraving by R. Nanteuil, 1661.

LOUIS XIV.



as themselves, took it into their heads that he was somewhat silly; and from that early companionship they had retained a certain contempt for the King, who noticed it, and in whose mind it secretly rankled—to their ultimate undoing.

At last, either from fear or from caprice, or else in remembrance of his part in the Royal ballet of *L'Impatience*,¹ Guiche decided to withdraw in favour of his kingly rival; but the imprudent boy did it with a very bad grace, and said most disagreeable things to Mlle de La Vallière. Then, since at twenty nothing can last, the very next day—as in a game of setting to partners!—he took the King's former place beside Madame Henriette, and that with such ostentation that Louis, who never allowed any one to adopt his own methods, ordered him to leave Fontainebleau. Upon this the Venetian Ambassador (these Italian diplomatists have often shown greater intelligence!) wrote to his Government that the union of the Royal Family grew closer every day!²

At last the ballet of the *Saisons* was given. Louise de La Vallière figured there beside Mlle de La Motte-Argencourt, the Lady Disdain of 1659, and the lately-scorned Mlles de Chimerault and de Pons. She represented a nymph, and this is the verse upon which she entered:

"Cette beauté depuis peu née,
Ce teint et ces vives couleurs,
C'est le printemps avec ses fleurs,
Qui promet une belle année."

¹ "Mon cœur avec l'amour a toujours quelque affaire,
Mais lorsque tout entier ma maîtresse l'aura,
Souvenez-vous que ce sera
Si mon maître n'en a que faire."

² "*Sempre più nella casa reale, si va crescendo l'amor.*" July 19, 1661, file 27. MSS. de la Bibliothèque Nationale. File 27 contains only despatches sent on August 30, 1661. From it we now go to file 29, that is to March 7, 1662.

Very ordinary, but very prophetic lines ! The success of the ballet was wonderful. It was performed five times in one month.

This little triumph of Louise was soon to be followed by a tremendous storm.

Superintendent Foucquet, one of the Cardinal's former Ministers, and Colbert, Mazarin's confidential servant, applied themselves with equal assiduity, but in different ways, to discover what the new King would do—whether his arbitrariness would last, or whether he would weary of rule and turn to pleasure. Foucquet found out first that the King had become indifferent to religion, and that a cabal was being formed to entangle him with an unknown lady. On June 27 he heard, through that "good fellow," the Queen-mother's confessor, that Louise de La Vallière was the lady in question.

Assuredly he must have seen her, a lady of the Court, at the hunting-parties and dancing in the ballets, but, enterprising as he was considered, he could not have paid attention to *all* the fair. Louise de La Vallière, without support of family or fortune, or any extraordinary beauty, and hitherto quite ignored, was hardly the kind of woman to attract a man of that age. But, when she became a personage, and what we would call in these days "a political factor," Foucquet began to study her, as he had for a long time studied the King.

Very contradictory stories were told. La Loy, a vulgar go-between, paid attention to what Fouilloux said, for Fouilloux "was not easily taken in." *She* said La Vallière had nothing whatever to do with it—it was all for Madame. And Fouilloux was still looking upon it as the first act of a comedy when, all of a sudden, the *dénouement* was brought about by the wonderful power of Love. All pretence disappeared, and a true deep passion reigned in its stead.

Soon it became impossible to conceal the real facts. From scandal, they proceeded to calumny. It was not La Vallière's first adventure ; there was no trick she had not employed to attract the King's attention. La Loy, who was highly experienced, and bitterly angry at not being in the secret of this new intrigue, suddenly threw light upon the matter ; *she* declared it was La Vallière who was the King's mistress, and that it must be a very serious affair since Louis surrounded it with so much mystery—a formidable mystery which Foucquet rashly made up his mind to penetrate.

During the summer of 1661, the sun refused to shine. A great deal of earth was moved at Fontainebleau during the enlargement of the canal. The Superintendent, scarcely recovered from an illness which, in December, 1660, had brought him to the doors of death, wearied with overwork, preyed upon by worry, and occupied with the thousands of voluntary and involuntary obligations of Court life, was not long in succumbing to malaria. On August 3, the fever fastened upon his body. For long it had been enervating his mind, and the man's equilibrium was destroyed.

We shall never know exactly what happened at this critical time. The prudence of the courtiers, the furious jealousy of the Prince, and the terror of the Court, have enwrapped it in impenetrable secrecy.

Foucquet, the victim of his own cunning, wished to see with his own eyes and hear with his own ears. That he tried to supplant the King in Louise's favour, or acted the gallant after the manner of Guiche and Brienne, is wholly inadmissible. He wanted simply to make himself pleasant to the favourite, and, like all those whom luck is abandoning, he made mistake upon mistake, and did inconceivably maladroit things. His attentions to La Vallière were

noticed, and commented upon at once to Menneville by a lady belonging to the Queen-mother's suite—and also belonging to Le Tellier. Moreover, the Comtesse de Soissons and Madame herself were annoyed. Mlle de Fouilloux told this to La Loy, without however authorising her to repeat it to Foucquet, who, of course, heard everything within the hour.

We have no date for this gossip, nor do we know if the Superintendent received it before or after the irreparable mistake which decided his fate. According to a letter, very suspect both as regards origin and style, Foucquet was supposed to have sent a go-between (possibly La Loy) to compliment La Vallière on her beauty, offering her at the same time 20,000 pistoles.¹ The girl was supposed to have replied that 250,000 *livres* would not make her do wrong. The inefficient go-between tried to talk her over, but found that it was waste of breath, so she earnestly advised Foucquet to get the start, and denounce the maid-of-honour to the King, as having asked for the money.

Foucquet was incapable of so dastardly an act, but in avoiding it, he fell into utter ruin. Meeting La Vallière in Madame's ante-room, he thought it a clever step to entertain her with praises of the King. He talked craftily to a woman whose only excuse for her wrong-doing was her incontestable candour! Therefore, hardly understanding or perhaps misinterpreting his words, the girl, bitterly wounded that any one should try to penetrate the secret of her heart, recounted their conversation to the man she loved.

Up to the present, Louis had suffered nothing worse than wounds to his self-esteem. When Mlle de La Motte-Argencourt and the Mancini girls had accepted

¹ True or false, this is to be found in a memoir of that time, // *Mercurio Postiglione*, p. 76. It speaks there of 25,000 doubles (*doppie*).

other homage than his, it had been a matter between himself and them, and the only revenge he took was to withdraw majestically. But now, in the first ardour of possessing a girl who loved him without coquetry, without ambition, "for himself," his jealousy became transformed into a blind and violent passion. While Foucquet tried to help him in this, he only saw—he was only allowed to see—that the Superintendent was a favourite with ladies for his wit, his charm, and his generosity. The ruin of the unfortunate man was all the more irrevocable because Louis concealed his anger, and no explanation was possible.

Ever since May 4, he had grown gradually more determined, for many reasons, upon Foucquet's ruin. In the middle of the Vaux festivities (August 17, 1661), which eclipsed even those at Fontainebleau,¹ the King, more incensed than surprised at the Superintendent's magnificence, had suddenly resolved to have him arrested in his own Castle. But his mother represented to him that it would be unworthy of his Royal Majesty so to ill-use a man whose hospitality they had accepted. Louis restrained himself, finished planning his journey to Bretagne,² and left for Nantes, where, on September 5, he secured the arrest of his Minister. The unfortunate man was imprisoned for some time in the Castle of Amboise, where little La Vallière had spent the happiest years of her life. A still more curious coincidence was that the holder of the post of Lieutenant to the King was then François de La Vallière, own brother to Louise.³

¹ This was not the first time the King had been to Vaux. For a long time every one had been talking about the decorations of the Castle.

² On August 4, the *Gazette* speaks of the preparations for a journey to Bretagne (1661, p. 797). It says also, on the 17th, after the journey to Vaux, "their Majesties showed entire satisfaction" (*Ibid.* p. 798).

³ In 1659, François de La Baulme Le Blanc, Lord of La Vallière, was appointed Lieutenant to the King at Amboise. *Inventaire analytique des archives municipales d'Amboise*, p. 113.

The authoritative act at Nantes had its consequences at Fontainebleau, where the two Queens of France were. The Queen of England joined them there.¹ Devotional exercises replaced the balls. There were no more romantic walks, but, instead, pilgrimages to neighbouring shrines. Meditative evenings terminated pious days. The Gentlemen of the Council went about alone, with a preoccupied air. Every one was living in an atmosphere of uneasiness and over-excitement. There, as at Nantes, the thunderbolt was to fall, but this time it missed its mark.

Anne of Austria was just then violently exasperated by poor Louise, who, she considered, was taking her son away from his duties. She would willingly have dismissed her from Court, but she was too much afraid of the King to do that. Mlle de La Motte-Argencourt of whom Louis no longer took any notice, was to suffer for the real culprit. In her anger, seeing the possibility of another victim, the Queen-mother took offence because the girl had, contrary to her directions, continued speaking to M. de Richelieu, and impressed upon her the necessity of shutting herself up in a convent. La Motte chose that of the Filles de Sainte-Marie de Chaillot. This name is worth remembering, for if the example had little effect, the remembrance of the deed impressed itself for ever upon the earnest soul of La Vallière, who during this stormy time, either from remorse or from prudence, lived a very retired life, hardly going out of her room—a tiny place among the garrets under the roof.

At this time, when several ladies of renown were

¹ *Gazette de France*, August 25, 1661. Mme de Motteville erroneously refers to the 28th, and, in the last edition, to September 1. See *Mémoires*, v. IV. p. 285.

shaking in their shoes on learning of the seizure of Fouquet's papers,¹ Louise—a frank sinner—felt herself guilty only before God. She saw the King again on September 9.² Absence, that final death-blow to a failing love, only intensifies its ardour in the beginning. Louis, having ridden post-haste day and night, came back more eager, more tender than ever. But then Louise had to follow her mistress and leave Court. So, one morning, the King mounted his horse and galloped as far as Vincennes, where he took a survey of the Castle. Thence, after having inspected the works at the Tuileries, he posted to Saint-Cloud, then to Versailles; early in the evening of the same day, he returned to Fontainebleau, having covered no less than thirty-seven leagues.³ This exploit, almost incredible in our enervated times, astonished his contemporaries. But none of them understood the reason for it. Monsieur, Madame, and Madame's maid-of-honour, Louise de La Vallière, were then at Saint-Cloud, and it was at Saint-Cloud that the King dined.

Shortly afterwards, Madame Henriette and her household went back to Fontainebleau. Nevertheless,

¹ The importance of these papers has been much exaggerated. See J. LAIR, *Nicolas Fouquet*, II. p. 86.

² Mme de La Fayette says the 8th, Loret the 9th.

"Le neuf de ce mois que l'Aurore
Chez Titon reposait encore. . .
Sa personne à telle heure indue
N'étant nullement attendue." . .

La Muse historique, v. III. p. 403.

³ "En icelle seule journée
Ayant fait, à n'en mentir pas,
Plus de cent douze mille pas,
À compter trois mille par lieue."

LORET, *La Muse historique*, v. III. p. 406. All the contemporary writers bear witness to the truth of this. See CHOISY, *Mémoires*, p. 590, published by Michaud and Poujoulat.

there was neither the April gaiety nor the June brilliancy to be seen. The Queen was 'nearing her confinement, and only went out to church. Madame was also about to give birth to a child, and was ill both physically and mentally. Every one, besides, was upset at the fall of the Superintendent. Money was getting scarce, and all purses were tightly shut.

A still greater calamity came to pass ; at the end of a summer whose tropical heat had been broken only by the most terrible storms, the spectre of famine threatened the autumn. The greater festivities were replaced by small hunting-parties in the yellowing woods. But what did it matter ? Almost indifferent to external things, the lovers loved anything which brought them together : the ball where they clasped hands, the chase where they rode side by side, the sound of music, or the deep silence of the woods—all were equally propitious to love-confidences.

If one wished to point out the happiest moments of Louise de La Vallière's tormented life, one would choose the October of 1661.

During this time, Marie-Thérèse, that innocent victim of a political alliance, lived in an atmosphere of mystery and silence, which was the outcome partly of fear, partly of pity. Obligated by her condition only to go out in her carriage, she could neither see nor hear anything. Her devotions absorbed her. Once only she broke through her reserve—and precisely when it would have been best to be circumspect.

At the news of the insult offered to the French Ambassador in London by the Spanish Ambassador, Louis became so furious that, forgetting the care due to the Queen, he broke out before her into threats

of revenge against his father-in-law, brutally expelled M. de Fuensaldagne, and forbade all communication with Madrid. Marie-Thérèse, in her turn, flew into a passion, bitterly reproached him, and took her father's part against her husband. Nothing could have wounded the King more. This crisis lasted during the second half of October. It was then that the young monarch went off riding into the forest with his mistress and some friends. But the cold wind, dismantling the trees, soon drove his guests to Paris. Madame went away on November 25, taking with her the favourite, still unknown as such, and desiring nothing better than this fortunate obscurity. Louis remained with the Queen, expecting her confinement every day. It would be unfair, in this history of his weaknesses, not to show how well he behaved during the time of trial. On November 1, at five o'clock in the morning, he confessed and communicated. Every one was anxious. From the ante-room, Marie-Thérèse could be heard shrieking in anguish : *Non quiero parir, quiero morir* (" I don't want to have a child, I want to die "). The King, the Queen-mother, everybody whose rank authorised him to be near the patient, wandered continually from the room to the chapel. At last, towards midnight, a Dauphin was born, whom Louis himself showed to the crowd assembled in the Court of the Oval.

The Sovereign's emotion and piety had a most moving effect upon these good people. They loyally wanted to believe that, except for the ordinary transports of youth, Louis had a real affection for the Queen. But the diplomatist who still officially represented Spain, while sending the news of the Dauphin's birth to Madrid, added some quaint reflections upon the religion of the French, who prayed to God in need, but utterly forgot Him in prosperity. M. de Vuorden (a cold

and judicial Fleming) did not believe in sudden emotions born either of desire or of fear !

The end of the year 1661, which witnessed the fall of Louise de La Vallière, was edified by the conversion of a notable sinner. On November 24, Madame Henriette, having worn herself out with imaginary troubles, was returning to Paris, reading a packet of the Comte de Guiche's letters, which had been thrown into her litter by the intriguing Montalais. Louise was with her, wrapt in thought. On that very day, a great Princess, Mme de Longueville, was commencing her general confession. She had resigned herself "to stirring up that dung-heap again." Utterly prostrated, afraid to raise her eyes to the altar, she compared herself to the Magdalen, called herself a miserable wretch, unworthy of the smallest atom of Divine Mercy. She longed to mortify her body, that accomplice of her wickedness, to retire far from all the world. It was "horrible presumption to think oneself fit to help one's neighbours ; when one was lost oneself, one was not worthy to serve others." Finally, when this penitent was admitted to Holy Communion, a cry escaped from her grateful lips : *Quid retribuam Domino pro omnibus quæ retribuit mihi* ("What shall I render unto the Lord for all His mercies?"). These thoughts, and even these very expressions, we shall hear later from the lips of Louise de La Vallière. And there is another no less surprising coincidence. It was to the church of the Carmelites that Mme de Longueville then made retreat most often,¹ and eighteen years afterwards her heart was to be received there by Louise de La Vallière, then Sister Louise de la Miséricorde, Carmelite Nun.

¹ See COUSIN, *Œuvres, Littérature*, v. III. pp. 196, 203, 216, 223. The piece quoted is a sort of confession commenced on November 24, 1661, and finished in January, 1662. We shall return later to the striking likeness between this and the *Réflexions*, a work by La Vallière.

CHAPTER IV

NOVEMBER, 1661—MARCH, 1662

AS a thanksgiving for the Queen's happy deliverance, the King made a pilgrimage to Notre Dame de Chartres. The country was profoundly impressed. But alas ! scarcely an hour after his return to Paris (December 10, 1661) he hurried (leaving Marie-Thérèse at the Louvre), to the Tuileries in search of Madame—or rather, of Louise de La Vallière, whom he had not seen for a fortnight. His visits became very frequent. Madame was ill ; and Louis did not weary *her* by a long stay. He would pay a formal visit, a formal compliment ; then, quickly taking leave of the rest, he would retire to a distant room with his mistress.¹ "All the doors were left open ; but people were less likely to interrupt them than if they had been triple-locked."

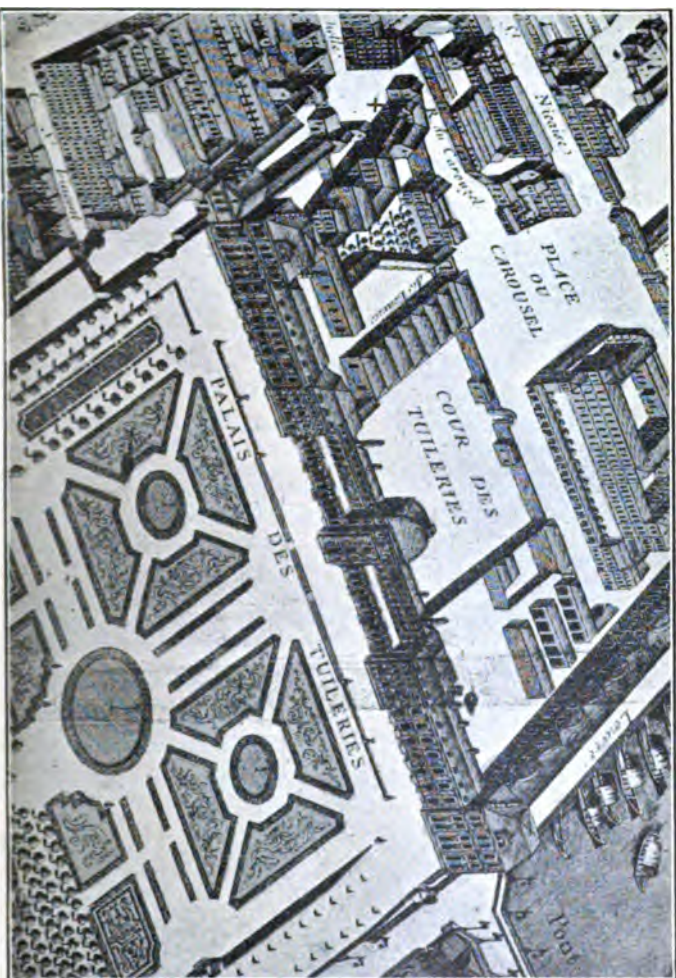
Faithful to her duty, Anne of Austria kept incessantly scolding her son. She even seems to have approached him indirectly as well. The *Gazette de France*, in its New Year number, waxed enthusiastic about Louis. "This incomparable sovereign, as wise as he is valiant. . . crowned, at twenty-three,

¹ "The King went there very often. At Fontainebleau it had been doubted that he was really in love with her. The Comte de Guiche said *he* was ; but people soon found out the truth. The King was La Vallière's lover, and de Guiche was Madame's. The kind of gossip that is supposed to be a secret, and that every one perfectly understands !" (Mlle DE MONTPENSIER, v. III. p. 527),

with victory, tranquillity, and affection." *Affection* meant, of course, "a wife and an heir—the climax of earthly hopes."¹ Almost certainly the paper had been given a hint of the King's new passion, and was now following it up by this excellent domestic homily. Nevertheless, the fun began all over again with the New Year. Monsieur gave a performance of *La Toison d'Or*, by Pierre Corneille; Madame, a ballet in nine scenes—the King danced in it, and represented the Sun. There was a grand performance every week, either at the Tuileries or the Louvre. Bread was scarce, famine was ravaging the country: but dear me! where *was* "the country"? In Paris one simply imported wheat, and had one's bread baked in huge ovens that were built in the very courtyard of the Tuileries itself, between two ball-rooms.² How should they remember the poor, while they watched the splendours of the ballet of *Hercule amoureux*, in which, besides Madame's young ladies, there figured all the pretty women of the two Queens' suites! A dazzlingly beautiful girl made her first appearance in this ballet—Athénaïs de Mortemart, then called Mlle de Tonnay-Charente, and later known to fame as Mme de Montespan. But, precocious coquette though she was, she then attracted none of the longed-for Royal attention; the King thought of no one but Louise de La Vallière. Far from diminishing, his passion waxed fiercer every day. In spite of the tact shown at Madame's, where "open doors were as if triple-locked," he soon broke through even that degree of constraint, and, by his orders, Louise would feign indisposition, so as to remain in her own small apartment.

¹ Loret, so early as August, 1661, had honoured Louise de La Vallière with a notice.

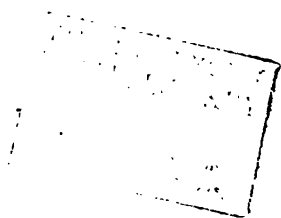
² See the reproduction of a contemporary engraving in *L'Histoire de France d'après les monuments*, by BORDIER and CHARTON, v. II. p. 243.



After a plan by Turgot.

† Hotel La Vallière.

THE TUILERIES AND THE HOTEL LA VALLIÈRE.



That marked a further stage along a path which seemed so inviting, and was to prove so fatal. By shutting herself up in this fashion, the girl escaped open comment; but, at the same time, her situation as the King's mistress became, as it were, a recognised thing. Moreover, false positions entail invidious companionships. Soon there installed herself at Louise de La Vallière's that Montalais damsel whom we have already come across at Blois, at the somewhat ill-disciplined Court of the Dowager-Madame; and again, later on, at Fontainebleau, as the go-between for the Comte de Guiche and Madame, to whom Mlle de Montpensier had recommended her.

The girl, who was well-born enough, was connected with the Bueil family. Two centuries before her time, a certain Jean de Bueil had composed an excellent educational treatise, in which he enjoined young folks not to be "too greedy for Court dainties." Evidently his young descendant had not read it—or, if she had, she had forgotten it. With no resources of her own, and frantically disappointed at not playing a "star-part," she did her very best to make a big one out of the humble confidant's. The King, who disliked her and thought her intriguing, had forbidden his mistress to speak to her. Louise "obeyed him in public, but Montalais would spend whole nights with her sometimes, and very often whole days too." To fill up the rest of her spare time, this very important young woman would go from M. de Guiche to Madame, and from Mlle de Tonnay-Charente to the Marquis de Noirmoutiers, chattering to each of the love-affairs of the rest, and requiring from all a secrecy which simple La Vallière was alone in keeping. Louise's conduct in not revealing the Comte de Guiche's relations with Madame was all the more admirable because the Princess was freezingly disdainful

to her, and also because she had promised the King that she would hide nothing from him.

Now Louis, very suspicious and very acute as well, easily divined the Montalais game; he also divined the state of affairs with his sister-in-law, and questioned Louise, who would say nothing. He insisted, and finally flew into a rage as violent as it was unavailing. The girl, so strong for all her weakness, obstinately refused to betray the secret of her rival and enemy. The King left, still furious; she was in despair. "They had often vowed that, whatever they might quarrel about, they would never go to sleep without making it up, and writing to one another." Yet the night came, and the night passed: never a word. Louise thought all was over, and lost her head; she left the Tuileries with the dawn. Her mother was still living at the Luxembourg, but, either from pride or from distrust, the poor child did not betake herself there. She went along the banks of the Seine, walking straight on in her anguish, until she came to the little village of Chaillot. There was a monastery—at that time a famous one—in Chaillot, that of the Visitation, whither Mlle de La Motte-Argencourt had but a few months ago retired. But the fugitive would not—or dared not—present herself there. She went on up the quarry-seamed hill, and finally knocked at the door of an obscure convent where dwelt some poor nuns, quite recently established, scarcely indeed as yet legally recognised. They refused to receive her inside the grating—she had to stay in the outside parlour. There she sank down, worn out with fatigue, cold, and utter misery.¹

¹ *Hist. de Madame Henriette*, p. 89. It has not been easy to fix for certain the locality of this convent. Mademoiselle and Saint-Simon say Saint-Cloud; but Mme de La Fayette, who wrote a few years after the event, says Chaillot. The libel called *Le Palais-Royal*, published about 1667, says Chaillot also. Now Mme de La Fayette was writing from Henrietta's dictation about 1665; we must therefore accept her

This took place about February 24. On that day, Don Christoval de Gaviria, Spanish Ambassador, was received at the Louvre for a farewell audience. Suddenly the King was observed to betray great agitation. A name had been whispered—was circulating through the groups—it was that of his mistress. "What is it? Tell me!" "La Vallière has taken the vows at Chaillot." Fortunately the Ambassadors were gone, for the King would totally have forgotten them, so overwhelmed was he by this intelligence.

It was the Lenten season. To the audience a sermon was to have succeeded, but Louis was in no humour to hear it. Directly he knew where La Vallière had gone, he galloped off there, "his face hidden in a grey cloak." He found her still in the parlour, lying on the ground, weeping wildly. They were left alone together, and Louise at length told him all that she had concealed. The avowal did not win her full forgiveness; but the King ordered her to return, and had a carriage fetched so that she might come at once.¹

version. Moreover, there was no "obscure convent" at Saint-Cloud, while there *was* one at Chaillot. "These nuns," says the Abbé LE BEUF (*Hist: du diocèse de Paris*, v. III. p. 57), "were transferred to Chaillot in the year 1659, although their letters-patent date only from 1671." The Abbey of Sainte-Périne, of la Villette, was later joined to this convent, and they were both called by the Abbey's name.

¹ *Hist: de Madame Henriette*, p. 90. It is clear, from our narrative, that the King had not to threaten to force the gates of the convent. Some writers have confused an incident of 1670 with one of 1662. The date is sufficiently indicated by the account in the *Hist: du Palais-Royal*, which tells of the reception of the Spanish Ambassadors; and by Mlle DE MONTPENSIER, who says "it was Lent." Don Gaviria was received at the Louvre on February 24 or 25. See the *Gazette*, or *La Muse historique*, v. III. p. 475. February 24 fell on a Friday. It is true that the *Gazette* mentions no sermon by Bossuet on that day (FLOQUET, *Études sur la Vie de Bossuet*, v. I. p. 146). But it does mention one on Sunday, the 26th. Finally, La Vallière's flight *must* have taken place in February, for in March we know that a complicated intrigue was got up against her. She was then back at the Tuileries, which she was to leave with Madame, towards the middle of the month, to go to the Palais-Royal.

But then another difficulty arose. Monsieur hastened to declare that he was very glad that "that girl" was out of his house, and that he had no intention of having her back. The King, ignoring his brother, "entered the Tuileries by the private staircase, and went into a little room, whither Madame was summoned. He did not wish to be seen, for he had been crying." Madame was no more inclined than was Monsieur to take back La Vallière. Louis attempted to break down her resistance by telling her all he had just heard about her; but that was stupid of him. Henrietta was foolish and light enough, but she was very proud, very touchy, and therefore most unlikely to yield to that kind of pressure. She was ready to promise to break with de Guiche, but not to take back her maid-of-honour. But at last she did yield to the Royal tears, and Louise came back to her room at the Tuileries.

So ended this little incident. The hour of retreat had not yet sounded. Not repentance for her wrongdoing, but a fit of vexation it was, which had swept the girl to that convent-door. Nevertheless, her flight plainly showed where deeper feeling would take her, when once she should begin to reflect. At this moment, there was but one idea in her head, and that was to regain the King's confidence. He did not quickly accord it her. "He could not get over her having been capable of hiding anything from him, and she was wretched because he was not pleased with her, so that she was really almost off her head for some time."¹

Louis was excessively jealous. Was he not a demi-god, and should any one share in the adoration due

¹ *Hist: de Madame Henriette*, p. 91. The Abbé LEQUEUX has followed these memoirs in the notice at the beginning of his edition of the *Lettres de La Vallière*

to Royalty ! It was by exciting this instinctive jealousy that Mazarin had extinguished his dawning passion for Mlle de La Motte-Argencourt. The suspicion of some sympathy between Marie Mancini and Charles of Lorraine had been enough to cut short a relation in which the young Sovereign had been near to sacrificing his honour. In 1662 Louis was more of the King—but he was still young ; and the young King was like any other young man, and could feel desperately jealous. He went so far as actually to question the Montalais girl. He was always afraid of “not being the first man whom his mistress had loved.” And some rumours of the Bragelonne flirtation had reached his ears—did Louise cherish tender memories ? He shuddered at the thought, and incessantly brought up the topic, eagerly questioning both La Vallière and Montalais. As the latter “was a better liar” than her friend, “he was always easier in his mind after she had had her say” ; and yet poor Louise, “utterly absorbed in her passion for him,” scarcely ever saw any of her former admirers, scarcely ever indeed even heard of them. Heedless of the future, heedless of the fact that many now looked to her for all sorts of little favours and condescensions from Royalty, and would be incensed at her inaccessibility, “she thought of nothing but loving, and being loved by, the King.”

Although she had not been Louis' mistress for more than eight or nine months at the outside, La Vallière quickly began to experience the disagreeables of a life which might well be figured as one of unmixed delight. She had to endure disdainful airs and malicious speeches from Madame, the familiarity of a girl like Montalais, the jealousy of an adulated Prince. Vainly did she hope to obliterate her error by modesty and disinterestedness ; such unusual qualities were more resented than pride or avidity would have been. If she

did not profit by "the advantages and the credit ensured her by so violent a love-affair, it was because she was too stupid." A favourite was, in fact, regarded as a political factor. Louise's extreme reserve, which ought to have disarmed jealousy, merely succeeded in exasperating ambition.

Ambition! It always has a numerous following, and most of them, in this case, were women. It is somewhat singular to observe that men—even those who were most acutely disappointed, most accustomed to a liberty now no longer theirs—had quickly recognised, and submitted to, the young King's absolute domination at Court. The women rebelled much longer; and one above all, the Comtesse de Soissons, *née* Olympe Mancini, was implacable. Olympe, of all Mazarin's nieces the most "Mazarinesque"; Olympe, crafty and ambitious, had made it her first care to gain an assured position in society by her marriage with a Prince who belonged both to the House of Savoy and to the Soissons branch of the Bourbons. Such alliances ensured her—or at any rate she thought so—very great influence at the French Court, mitigating circumstances in case of disgrace, and, in any event, the protection of a Princely House.¹

She "went slowly" for three years—from 1657 to 1660—and then, her star dawned. She had got rid of her sisters—Marie, formidable in intellect, but now exported to Rome; Hortense, equally redoubtable in beauty, but now the prey of a jealous husband, M. de la Meilleraye. M. de Soissons was quite different. A "good husband"—by the ladies' standard—he

¹ They were of some use to her in the end; Louis XIV. had to reckon with these alliances. See RAVAISSON, *Archives de la Bastille*, v. IV. p. 73.

thought himself the master because he always took his wife's part. Thus when, in 1661, he was egged on by Olympe to offend the Duc de Navailles, he got himself exiled from Court by the King, who however kept the Countess by him. Olympe, it will be remembered, had managed to obtain the appointment of Superintendent of the Queen's Household in 1660, when Marie-Thérèse was still incapable of having any opinion on Mazarin's selection. Almost immediately after the marriage, the Queen noticed that the King spent all his leisure-time at the Soissons habitation.¹ She complained of it, and Anne of Austria supported her. Olympe paid scant attention to either. Crafty as she was, she lent herself at first complaisantly enough to the Royal flirtation with La Vallière: if the King was for ever with *that girl*, nobody could say it was the Comtesse de Soissons who kept him away from the Queen. But so soon as the flirtation developed into a passionate love-affair, Olympe's complaisance altered into jealousy, and jealousy soon turned to deadly hatred.²

As auxiliary, or rather accomplice, she selected René-François du Bec-Crespin, Marquis de Vardes, a son of Jacqueline de Bueil, Comtesse de Moret, ex-mistress of Henri IV. He was brave enough, but very intriguing, and a terrible liar. Nevertheless, he was a glass of fashion: he was "delicious."³ Ten years older than any of the rest of his set, Vardes, young in face, but hoary in vice, was making love to Madame all the while he was conspiring with the Countess. His wife, a Nicolai, had died in 1660,

¹ Olympe "was mistress of the Court, of the festivities, of the Royal favours" (SAINT-SIMON, v. IV. p. 254).

² Saint-Simon says erroneously that the King was always at the Countess's *before* and after his marriage. *After*, yes; *before*, no. See our account of the journey to Lyons.

³ MME DE MOTTEVILLE, v. IV. p. 279.

and her death had been the source of some annoyance to her widower. He was so attractive that only too many traps were set to catch him as a husband! The dying lady had left him a little daughter—the price of her own life. Some sense of duty might well have steadied Vardes now; but worthlessness was his chosen rôle. He played the inconsolable husband for a while, then handed his daughter over to her mother's family—which was, one must admit, the best thing he could have done for her.

Louise de La Vallière was hardly back from her flight to the Chaillot convent before the two allies launched a sort of infernal machine against her. They had determined to provoke so huge a scandal that the poor girl would be obliged to leave the Tuileries and the Court for good, and so give up her post to another, "whom they might be better able to make use of."¹ The Queen as yet knew nothing of the King's passion: Anne of Austria's maternal care had kept it from her ears. On the day that Louis fled from the sermon to Chaillot in search of his mistress, Anne of Austria had distracted the attention of her daughter-in-law, whom she knew to be of very jealous disposition.

This jealousy was precisely what Vardes and Mme de Soissons were counting on for their brilliant exploit, and for obtaining the dismissal of a mistress who was too disinterested to be of any service to them. They had resolved to warn the Queen, by means of an anonymous letter, which was to be supposed to come from Spain. Vardes composed it, and, as Marie-Thérèse was not as yet able to read French well, the

¹ *Hist. de Madame Henriette*, confirmed by Guiche's letter to the King. See *Réflexions sur la miséricorde de Dieu*, v. II. p. 193. This letter demonstrates Mme de La Fayette's scrupulous exactitude. See *Mme DE MOTTEVILLE*, v. IV. p. 373; and, above all, the despatch of Sagredo, the Venetian Ambassador, to the Doge; *Archives de la Bastille*, v. I. p. 284.

Marquis, remembering that Guiche was a fairly good Spanish scholar, persuaded him to join the plot by exciting him to anger against the maid-of-honour who had repulsed him at Fontainebleau. "He told him that La Vallière had been trying to ruin him, and was evidently trying still, for she had denounced him to the King as having been disrespectful to her."

The anonymous letter, somehow translated by Guiche, was put into an old envelope that the Comtesse de Soissons had managed to pick up in the Queen's room.¹ Everything had been carefully thought out. Towards the beginning of March, 1662,² the intriguers profited by Gaviria's departure, which made it seem natural enough that a packet of letters should arrive by another hand. A man who was sure not to reappear in Paris for a long time took the one in question to a guard named Saint-Eloy, charging him to transmit it to one of the Queen's maids, called la Risse. This la Risse was of doubtful reputation, and Vardes counted upon her at once delivering the packet to Marie-Thérèse.³ The plot

¹ The author of the libel, *La Princesse ou les Amours de Madame*, gives the text of this letter. The work is so manifestly composed by an ignorant person that one cannot give it much credence. For example, Guiche is made to say that it was *he* who slipped the letter into the Queen's bed, where it was found by Doña Molina, who took it to the King! And there are many other as palpable blunders. Anyhow, here is the text: "To the Queen.—The King is rushing into a licentious intrigue which is known to every one except your Majesty. Mlle de La Vallière is the object of his attachment. Some faithful servants warn your Majesty. It is for yourself to decide whether you can love the King when he comes to you from another's arms, or if you will resolve to prevent a thing which must dishonour you if it continues." See *Hist. amour: des Gaules*, v. III. p. 167.

² Guiche, in his letter, says that they took advantage of the departure of Don Christoval de Gaviria. Now he had had his farewell audience on Feb. 25. Guiche adds that the letter was given on a day when the King was at Versailles. He went there on March 1st (*Gazette de France*, 1662, p. 217).

³ The Royal letters were transmitted through the Ambassadors. Those which came by post were handed directly to the King by a

failed through excess of precautions. The letter fell into the hands of Doña Molina, a sensible and devoted woman. Fearing some bad news from the Queen's home (the King of Spain was then ill) the duenna took upon herself to open the letter, and, having read it, carried it to the Queen-mother, who ordered her to communicate it to the King on his return from Versailles. Vardes was with him, hoping to enjoy the sight of his first outburst of rage. Louis read the letter. He was at first surprised, uneasy—then his face flamed with anger. Amazed at finding any one in his kingdom so insolent as to meddle in his private affairs, he roughly asked Molina if the Queen had seen the letter, and when she had told him "No" more than once, he put the missive in his pocket, where he kept it carefully.

The plot had failed—but who had woven it? ¹ For long the mystery was impenetrable. Louis addressed himself to Vardes, as "a clever man in whom he had confidence." The unscrupulous Vardes threw suspicion on the Duchesse de Navailles, one of the Queen's Ladies — an excellent woman, who

functionary whom we now entitle *directeur-général*. See despatch from Sagredo to the Doge of Venice, March 20, 1665, *Archives de la Bastille*, v. I. p. 284; D'ORMESSON, *Journal*, v. II. p. 330.

There is an official account of this incident in a despatch from Lionne to Comminges, Ambassador to England (*Archives of Foreign Affairs, England*, vol. 84, fol. 102):

"Account of the affair with Vardes and the Comte de Guiche: they had together fabricated a letter in Spanish, telling of the intrigue with Mlle de La Vallière, and had had it given to one of the Queen's women, Señora Molina, who prudently abstained from showing it to her mistress."

(Communicated by my deplored friend, Achille Moranville.)

¹ *Hist: de Madame Henriette*, p. 96; MME DE MOTTEVILLE, v. IV. p. 326. There are notable differences between these two accounts, from which Sagredo's despatch also differs; but the essentials are the same, and Mme de Motteville, who was Molina's friend, claims the preference. She was the only person who knew the facts three years before the authors of "this wretched invention" were discovered.

later on suffered cruelly from this abominable calumny.¹

These incidents, so trifling to the reader, but so important to the actors and supernumeraries in them, took place between February and March, 1662. It would be a mistake to measure by their standard all the personages of that time, or even some of those who were on the stage in this very act in the eternal comedy of human weakness. At this Lenten season, Louis and his Court were attending the Chapel Royal at the Louvre, where for the first time "the Abbé Bossuet, Doctor in Theology of the Faculty of Paris," was preaching. It is a joy and a relief to study his powerful phrases, which express a mind then almost at its best; a joy, too, to find that the orator's character was as lofty as his noble eloquence.

On February 26, 1662, the day after La Vallière's flight to the convent, when she had been back at the Tuileries for some hours, Bossuet preached the sermon for the First Sunday in Lent. He spoke trenchantly against "those delicate passions which in ordinary people are called vices," against "treacherous attentions," against "evil living." He exhorted the King to hearken to the voice of his conscience. "Then the Divine Word will rush in, as with a scourge, breaking every idol, casting down every altar where the creature is adored. . ." "O God, Thou seest where I stand, and Thou knowest the words that I should say. Give me those words—those all-powerful words; give me prudence; give me strength; give me circumspection; give me simplicity. Sir, it is God who truly speaks from this pulpit. May He speak though the inspiration of His Holy Spirit,

¹ Vardes also tried to make the King suspect Mlle de Montpensier, "whose mind is so restless." Sagredo's Despatch to the Doge. *Archives de la Bastille*, v. I. p. 285.

for He alone can do this great thing ; man must hide his head."

Bossuet is now so thoroughly vindicated from the reproach of being insensible to the misery of the poor that we do not feel obliged to quote his vigorous sermon of March 5, 1662, upon charity. He did more than preach upon charity. He reminded his Prince, who was so inclined to absolutism, that above his earthly Kingdom there was another, in which Sovereigns would meet on equal terms with their subjects, "whom the grace of Jesus Christ and the Heavenly Insight will have changed into their companions" (March 8 or 10, 1662). No one escaped his just censure. He knew—none better—the atmosphere of that Court, where gallantry was encouraged and politics were forbidden. He lavished counsel ; he condemned flattery, condemned favour-hunting. "O Court, so truly august and kingly, if I could but destroy the ambition which is ruining you, the jealousies which are staining you as with blood,¹ the pleasures which are corrupting you, the iniquities which are dishonouring you! . . ." Then, coming to the primary cause of all these disorders : "If I were to speak my thought out plainly ! Love is in some sort the god of the heart. Love moves all—even the most secret recesses of the soul. Is he not then, as I have said, the god of the heart, or rather its idol, which usurps the empire of God ? . . . O King, listen to Jesus, and learn of Him, the King of Glory, that our hearts are meant to love God alone, and that we must help others to do the same. O creatures, shameful idols that ye are, leave this Royal

¹ In our opinion Bossuet here alludes to a duel which had taken place on January 20, near Chaillot, between eight gentlemen—the Marquis de Noirmoutiers, de la Ferté, Chalais, the Marquis d'Antin, nephew of the Archbishop of Sens, etc. (GUY-PATIN, *Lettres*, v. II. p. 306).

heart! Shadows, phantoms, disappear in presence of the Truth! The Love of Love, the Truth, desires to enter this heart; false love, deceitful passion, will ye dare to stand before the Truth?" And, pursuing the theme: "O God," he cried, "what shall we ask of Thee for this great monarch? All prosperity? Yea, Lord, and much more—all virtues, both as King and as Christian; not one may be lacking, not one, not one! He must have them all, let the world say what it will. . . We must have him wholly perfect. . . 'Tis his glory, his greatness itself, that he is obliged to stand to us for an example; it would be our common misfortune if there were one shadow on his illustrious career. Yes, Sire—*your* pity, *your* justice, *your* innocence are the guarantees of public felicity. There is a God in Heaven who avenges the sins of peoples. . . but above all, the sins of Kings. It is He who wills me to speak as I do; and if Your Majesty will hear Him, He will whisper to your inmost heart those things which men dare not say to you."

Finally, after having dwelt upon "that ennobling duty of great men and princes, to lead a better life than others do," the great orator added: "And truly, our Sovereigns would justly anger the Living God if, surrounded by His benefits as they are, they should seek to taste those earthly joys which He expressly forbids them."¹

Then with what tact he strives to influence the young King by showing him the perspective of a glorious reign—his well-known ambition! "For your

¹ Third Sermon for Palm Sunday. FLOQUET, *Études*, v. II, p. 201; cf. GANDAR, *Bossuet orateur*, p. 397. M. l'Abbé Le Barcq points out some very pregnant passages in these Lenten Sermons:

"It is not expedient for any man to have no superior. Those who owe no earthly obedience should be all the readier to submit to Heaven" (*loc. cit.* p. 364).

Majesty are reserved great things, illustrious things, beyond the ken of the Kings who have preceded you. Be faithful to God, then ; do not injure by your transgressions the designs of the future ; but lift the glory of your name and of France to such a height that there shall be nothing left for you to desire but the Eternal Felicity."

All this is admirably said, and the course of our narrative will frequently recall it. But here are some still more astonishing words—prophetic words, indeed—which fell upon La Vallière's ears on March 31, 1662.

Bossuet had been speaking of Magdalen's fall, and he went on to point out the remedy and the reparation : "Magdalen's heart is broken, her face is suffused with shame, her mind is bent upon the true vision of her state, upon the profound realisation of her danger. She is so utterly wretched that she hurries to the Physician with all her heart in her eyes ; her sense of shame flings her humbly at His feet ; knowledge of her danger keeps her still afraid, even after He has spoken to her ; she hardly knows which to ponder most—her hope of future resistance to temptation, or the joy of having been so blissfully, so mercifully, forgiven."

It is as if Bossuet already saw the weeping penitent in the young favourite from whom he sought to detach the King's heart, so plainly does he seem to have traced her path for her ! But before the Divine Word could take root, five swift years of pleasure were to pass, followed by seven long ones of grief and humiliation.

CHAPTER V

MARCH, 1662—DECEMBER, 1662

LENT over, Court-life began again as usual. Louis had admired Bossuet's budding genius, and he felicitated the orator; then he divided the apostolic advice into two parts. As man, he was indulgent for himself; as prince, severe for others. Guiche and Montalais, quite too intriguing, were exiled.

We shall make as short work as possible of these side-issues; but if we are to give a clear idea of what was going on in the maid-of-honour's apartments, we must present some of the adventures in the quarters of the Duchesse d'Orléans. Guiche would go there, disguised as a foreigner, as a fortune-teller, as anything you please. When he was exiled, he was anxious to see Madame again before he went—and he succeeded, thanks to Montalais. But he was very nearly caught by Monsieur, and had to hide "in a fireplace which closed with double doors." As ill-luck would have it, what did Monsieur do but begin to eat an orange, the peel of which he plainly proposed to throw into Guiche's hiding-place! One of Madame's maids, accustomed to these extra-duties, adroitly exclaimed, "My prince, please don't throw away the peel—I love it!" Monsieur gave it her, "and so the Count and Madame had a narrow escape."¹ But they were not

¹ *La Princesse: His: tam our: des Gaules*, v. II. p. 184. We should

quite out of the wood. Another maid-of-honour, D'Artigny, had found out their secret and told it to the Queen-mother, who in her turn instructed Monsieur. "People told that Prince what they would have concealed from any other husband." Philippe took it quietly, and was satisfied with dismissing Montalais, who departed with a casket full of Guiche's letters.¹ Most of these Madame had not read, which is scarcely surprising, for Guiche wrote four times a day.

On April 29, 1662, the *Gazette* published the following note :

"The Comte de Guiche has left here for Lorraine to command the King's troops, as Lieutenant-General, His Majesty having testified, by giving him this important post, the esteem in which his person is held at Court. . ." A semi-official sheet in our own day could not be more impeccably correct. The Norman writer, Loret, got in a delicate hint in the *Muze historique* :

"Je ne sçay pas bien pourquoi
On ne me l'a point fait entendre,
Mais le temps nous poura l'apprendre."

Having thus satisfied his conscience as to the behaviour of his subjects, the King could again devote his attention to his own pleasures. On June 5, 1662, the celebrated "Carrousel" began—that carousal which has given its name to the square where it took place. It has been frequently said that Louis gave this magnificent entertainment for his mistress.² There is no proof of this. Louis loved "big shows," and always took care to play a big part in them. In later

not have quoted a word from these libels if we had not found the same story in Mme de La Fayette's most accurate book. The libel calls the girl Collogon (Coëtlogon); Mme de La Fayette calls her Montalais.

¹ The author of *La Princesse* calls this girl Barbezières, v. II. p. 172.

² M. DREYSS, à propos the Carrousel, speaks of the scandal of the Royal love-affair: *Mémoires de Louis XIV.*, v. I. Preface, p. 90. The affair was scarcely public property at all at that time.

years, he desired to represent this kind of thing as part of a settled policy.¹ But this one was distinctly nothing more than a Royal amusement. La Vallière appeared, but was in no way distinguished from the crowd. Indeed there are many indications that, at this time, the King's affections were divided.

Louis had made a short stay at Saint-Germain—from May 7 to 15. On June 18, the day after the Carrousel ended, he returned there, resolved to finish an adventure which had been begun some months before. The great love of the Queen, the great passion of La Vallière, were no longer sufficient for this young man of twenty-four, who was as wise in serious affairs as if he had been for years upon the throne, but as susceptible to the advances of women as a boy just out of school.

Madame de Soissons had not given up yet! After the *fiasco* of the Spanish letter, she changed her tactics, and resolved to supply the King with a new charmer. One of the Queen's maids was then beginning to attract attention. She was "pretty enough to inspire genuine passion," and cold and self-controlled enough to sacrifice no benefits that might come from Royal favour, to such a thing as love. A man who was not her enemy has thus characterised her: "Though not a dazzling beauty, she had drawn away lovers from the celebrated Menneville."² Her name was Anne-Lucie de La Motte-Houdancourt. She must not be confused with Mlle de La Motte-Argencourt—long-forgotten object of the Royal passion!—nor with Mlle de La Motte-Houdancourt (Françoise-Angélique), daughter of the Maréchal, who in 1662

¹ DREYSS, *Mémoires de Louis XIV.*, v. II. p. 566.

² *Mémoires du Chevalier de Grammont*, chap. V. Hamilton says that La Motte was maid to the Queen-mother—an error which would not signify if it was not one of a long series in connection with this young lady.

would not have been more than fourteen years old.¹ Anne-Lucie became the tool of the Comtesse de Soissons, who "presented" her at Saint-Germain rather than at Paris, for at Paris the Duchesse de Navailles watched too closely over her unruly little troop. Mme de Navailles has often been represented as desperately virtuous, "a regular cross old duenna"; but she was really a woman of about thirty-five, very witty, as delightful to talk to as to look at²—in short, a really good type, vigilant, and with a strong sense of duty. This vigilance it was hoped to foil at Saint-Germain.

The Chevalier de Grammont—a famous personage, as vicious as he was attractive, and as temerarious as he was vicious—had the audacity to interfere in this affair. As we have seen in the cases of Guiche and Brienne, it was sufficient at that time for the King to have spoken more than once to any young lady for all other persons to keep their distance. Admirers very humbly withdrew all claims of every kind, and offered thenceforth merely their respects. Grammont, who "cherished a reputation for singularity," did the exact reverse. He had never thought of La Motte, but directly she was honoured with his Sovereign's attention, he began to consider her worthy of his own. This was inconvenient, and the lady denounced him—so he did not take long to learn that "if love makes all equal, rivalry does not." Louis made no bones

¹ It would be impossible to enumerate the confusions between La Motte-Argencourt and La Motte-Houdancourt. We shall merely mention two which are of some importance on account of the great authority of the authors: M. CHÉRUÉL, in Note III. on the *Mémoires de Saint-Simon*, v. V. p. 457, 1865 edition; M. DE MONMERQUÉ, *Lettres de Sévigné*, Hachette edition, 1872, v. II. p. 48. The annotator ought to have seen that, according to his own calculation, *his* La Motte-Houdancourt could not have been more than eleven in 1662!

² The Portrait-Gallery at the Versailles Museum has a portrait of the Duchesse de Navailles copied from a family picture. E. SOULIÉ, *Notice du musée de Versailles*, v. III. p. 166. No. 3537.

about it: he simply exiled his rival.¹ Left master of the field, he made no bones about that either—he climbed roofs, he ran along the leads by the beauty's chamber, he spoke to her through a defective partition. It was highly romantic. The new Castle of Saint-Germain, a charming if not exactly a solid construction, "lent itself admirably to these amorous adventures. La Vallière was in jealous despair; but the King, egged on by La Motte's resistance, ran after her unceasingly." And an extremely silly young man he proved himself.

Mme de Navailles had frequently tried to impress upon all who happened to be concerned that they must not trespass upon her special domain. Louis sometimes felicitated her on her fine fighting-qualities, sometimes bluntly demanded a surrender. The Duchess, in dire perplexity, took advantage of a visit to Paris with the Queen-mother² to consult a casuist, M. Joly. That ecclesiastic advised her to do her duty and resist the King, even if it should bring her into disgrace. The counsel was unhesitatingly given, and as unhesitatingly followed. Things were getting serious. The good lady was hardly back before she was informed that men, in no way resembling thieves, had been seen running along the roofs near the maids-of-honours' little rooms. In the morning she had the doors walled up and the windows barred. Solid bars, too; it took no less than thirty or forty *suisses* to put them up. There was no delay; they were up that very day, and the lady slept in peace. But when she

¹ *Mémoires du Chevalier de Grammont*, chap. v. Grammont arrived in England in June, 1662. See chap. vi. of the *Mémoires*. His attempt then had evidently been prior to the stay at Saint Germain.

² On August 15, Anne of Austria went to pass the Feast-Days at Val-de-Grâce, at the Grandes Carmélites (*Gaz. de France*, 1662). M. Joly was *curé* of St. Nicolas-des-Champs, so Mme de Navailles could easily consult him.

woke, lo and behold! all the bars were lying in the courtyard. The sensation was enormous—people talked of nothing else all day. Louis was more amazed than any one else at the extraordinary accident. At dinner he made desperate fun of Mme de Navailles: "It *must* be ghosts, for the door was shut, and your guards saw no one come in." She was speechless: there was nothing to say. . . And it was so that the future Great King played the seducer, the scamp, the libertine à la Roquelaure school!

But the game was nearly up. La Motte, half-yielding, made but one condition—the dismissal of La Vallière. She actually had the hardihood to insist, to throw a pair of earrings in the King's face, exclaiming, "I don't care for you or your earrings, if you won't give up La Vallière. . ." But even those who most disapproved of the King's conduct could not but prefer the mistress to intriguing Houdancourt. The Queen-mother knew that the latter's pathetic epistles were dictated by two of Mme de Soissons' creatures, and that one "was to be written to demand the dismissal of La Vallière." She told her son just what it would say, and "proved to him thus that he was simply the dupe of the Comtesse de Soissons." Of all affronts, the King most hated that kind. In the evening, when the Countess delivered the supposed La Motte letter, Louis found that it said exactly what he had been told it *would* say. Somewhat ashamed of himself, he burnt the precious missive, and from that moment La Motte ceased to exist for him. The girl, on her side, facing her misadventure boldly enough, affected the airs of a vestal virgin to all other men—a vestal virgin, however, on the look-out for a husband, for the inconsolable poor thing ended by marrying the Marquis de La Vieuville.

Anne of Austria was not the only person who was observant of Louis. Another counsellor now spoke—and one who did so with unrivalled authority. This was the Royal Physician, Vallot, who diagnosed in his patient, “dull, sick headaches, with an inclination to dizziness; some heart-trouble, weakness, and depression. . .” He considered that the King hunted too much. But that was only one cause; there was another: “He did not have all the sleep he needed.” His Majesty unwillingly consented to “sleep a little more than he had been wont to do”; he also allowed himself to be nursed a little, drugged, purged, but with such a delicious dose, invented expressly for him—peony-heads, red roses, crushed pearls, spirit of vitriol!—that he quite enjoyed taking it.¹ But probably the slight rest did him more good than even the specially-invented drug.

The ladies’ plot, which had developed itself between June 19 and the end of August, 1662, was followed by a last skirmish, a forlorn hope. Montalais, though banished from Court, was not yet beaten. She wrote from the depths of her convent to La Vallière “two long letters, telling her what she ought to do, and what she ought to say to the King.”² Louise made no mysteries this time. She brought the letters to Louis, and he wrote instantly to an aunt of his, who happened to be Abbess at Fontevrault:

¹ *Journal de la santé du roi*, p. 80.

² *Hist: de Madame Henriette*, p. 109. Madame de La Fayette, as usual, is the authority for the details of this little history. Compare her account with Mme de Motteville’s, for instance: “They say that Mlle de La Vallière’s fate was decided largely by the fact that Mlle de La Motte hesitated so long and seemed likely to resist to the end; while La Vallière, having ceased to struggle, conquered, so to speak, by her defencelessness” (v. V. p. 147). La Vallière had long since yielded to a genuine passion, while Mlle de La Motte was merely playing the coquette.

" SAINT-GERMAIN-EN-LAYE,
" August 22, 1662.

" MY AUNT,

" Having been obliged, for good reasons, to remove the *demoiselle* de Montalais from the convent of the English nuns in the Faubourg Saint-Marcel, and to banish her from Paris, I have thought it well to send her to your House. I shall be glad if you will receive her there, and if you will further give orders that she be closely observed, and that she have no communication, either oral or written, with any one whatever outside the convent gates."¹

This Abbess was Jeanne-Baptiste, daughter of Henri IV. and Charlotte des Essarts, a legitimated Princess of France. Montalais was brought to Fontevrault by a Police-officer, was closely confined, and did not leave her quasi-prison until the end of November.

Louis, that giddy husband but austere sovereign, had scarcely disposed of his sister-in-law Henrietta, Guiche, and their supernumeraries, before he was obliged to intervene between the old Duke of Lorraine and two young ladies who had been either too trusting or too thoughtless. One, Mlle de Saint-Remi, who was a kind of sister of Louise de La Vallière, was also a kind of sister-in-law of the King.

— It will be remembered that Saint-Remi, Louise's step-father, had a daughter by his first marriage, and that she, still at the Luxembourg, was still, therefore, the companion of the Princesses of Orleans. This little group was unchangingly romantic. Young Charles of Lorraine had awaked the girlish passions of the young Princesses, and now his old uncle, Duke Charles, was making trouble among the Princesses'

¹ *Ceuvres de Louis XIV.*, v. p. 90. On November 20, 1662, Louis sent the order for Montalais' release (*ibid.* p. 103)

dependents, and caricaturing Louis' gallantries in a way which was highly displeasing to that haughty Prince.

The old man, who had been a widower and had then married morganatically, got weary of his *femme de conscience*, and came to Paris, ostensibly on political affairs, but really "on the spree." But on February 6, 1662, he had found himself obliged—and very cleverly trapped he had been!—to sign the Treaty of Montmartre, which despoiled him of his States. This was a terrible blow to the Lorraine forces, but the old Duke was a philosopher; he let people talk, and interested himself in the rounding-off of an adventure—begun in 1661—with Marianne Pajot, the daughter of Mlle de Montpensier's apothecary. This he had inaugurated on the very day after he had asked for that arrogant Princess's hand for his nephew.¹ No one had dreamed of taking the affair seriously. But the amazing old man did actually make up his mind to marry his *bien-aimée*. He even obtained the approval of his brother, Duke Francis; and things went so far that, in the afternoon of April 18, 1662, there assembled in the house of *sieur* Tistonnet, *maître apothicaire*, Rue Saint-Honoré, to sign the contract, "the very high, excellent, and most serene Duke Charles, by the Grace of God Duke of Lorraine; Francis, his only brother, *etcetera*; and the very noble persons, Claude Pajot and Elizabeth Souart, his wife,

¹ SEGRAIS, in his *Mémoires*, p. 88, 1723 edition (Amsterdam), says that Mademoiselle had refused the Prince of Lorraine "because the salt-works were not so valuable as she had imagined." Upon which, M. CHÉRUEL (*Mémoires de Mlle de Montpensier*, v. III, p. 522, note) exclaims that Segrais is not trustworthy. It is Mademoiselle, on the contrary, who is not. Here is an extract from the *Mémoires de Beauvau*, p. 193: "The Duke . . . showing himself to be extremely annoyed by Mademoiselle's hesitation, said that she was too eager about certain securities upon which she had set her heart, and that she wanted him to resign his States quite as much as to ascertain the value of the revenues of Lorraine and Bar."

stipulating for Mlle Marianne-Françoise, their daughter." After having declared that he had at first dedicated himself to the "tranquillity of celibacy," the Duke added that "by the unforeseen design of that Providence which reserves to itself the right of governing the hearts and regulating the conduct of princes, he now found himself called to make a second marriage, which seemed quite imperative to his conscience, if he was to follow the directing voice." And that was why he had decided that "the best method was to choose a wife in whom modesty and discretion took the place of those more glittering and showy qualities which minister rather to the ambition of the man than to the chaste and conjugal love of the husband." One wonders if Louis perceived the allusion—a tolerably distinct one!

The notary continued reading the deed. "For these reasons—and having proved that illustrious birth is not invariably conducive to conjugal bliss, especially when the alliance has been a political one, entered into for purely human interests, with no thought of that affection which, in this mysterious relationship, is the bond of hearts as well as of persons—and considering the admirable, the noble qualities of Mlle Marie-Anne-Françoise Pajot, which were accompanied by a rare virtue, a solid piety," and so forth. . . Followed the recital of the contract—which was signed. The Dowager-Duchess of Orleans soon heard of this delightful project. The King, informed by her, had the future Duchess shut up at For-l'Evêque. Mlle de Montpensier, not displeased by her step-mother's vexation, dismissed the apothecary, "though he was a very good servant."¹ "Amongst ordinary

¹ *Mémoires de Beauvau*, pp. 221-227. SAINT-SIMON, *Mémoires*, Boislisle edition, v. III. p. 32. Marianne Pajot became Marquise de Lassay. See *Recueil de différentes choses*, v. I. p. 5.

people," says the Princess, "the father of a mother-in-law would not marry the servant of his daughter-in-law, if the daughter-in-law had any voice in the matter. It would be an affront. I did my duty." And she recorded the fact in her memoirs, so that posterity might not be ignorant of it—which "ordinary people" would perhaps have thought unnecessary.

Much piqued at this dismissal, the Duke fussed and fumed, and tried to get Marianne back; but the King kept her close—and the Duke resigned himself. A needy poor devil, he was lodging in a wretched hut with the gardener of the Luxembourg.¹ He had his meals with his sister at the Orleans Palace, and she lectured him indefatigably. Our incorrigible listened, and while he did so, admired Catherine de Saint-Remi, the daughter of La Vallière's step-father. Words soon succeeded to admiring glances. He asked for meetings—he obtained them. The rendezvous was at a *demoiselle* La Haye's, wife of Mme d'Orléans' apothecary: the Duke had evidently dedicated himself to apothecaries. After a short time this eminently moral old gentleman made a formal proposal. Saint-Remi "was foolish enough to give his consent, forgetting what had just happened, and forgetting, too, the light-hearted nature of the Ducal passions." But naturally the old Marquis, step-father of the King's mistress, was prepared for the extraordinary! The news was even announced in the *Gazettes*. . . Alas, it was a short-lived dream. Madame-Dowager unhesitatingly shut up the apothecary's wife and the Saint-Remi young lady together in one room. The redoubtable Charles was turned out of the Luxembourg. He tried to force the gates, was repulsed with a

¹ *Relation des ambassadeurs vénitiens*, file 29, folio 147, Bibliothèque nationale: "*Una piccola casetta nel giardino del Luxemburgo ove habitava l'hortolano del luoco.*"

halberd, and made up his mind to return to Lorraine. He was scarcely home before—irrevocably bent on matrimony—he had exchanged vows with a Canoness and with a daughter of La Haye the apothecary, to say nothing of a conditional confirmation of his anterior union with the Princesse de Cantecroix.

When the sexagenarian charmer was safely gone, Mlle de Saint-Remi was restored to her virgin liberty. For the epilogue, we turn once more to La Grande Mademoiselle: "Saint-Remi was much blamed for not having got her married (his daughter), and also for not disobeying Madame altogether. His post was not good enough to make up for sacrificing his daughter's chance of a semi-royal marriage; but I think her step-mother, who did not love her, prevented him." This step-mother is Louise de La Vallière's mother. As for the girl, "she shortly afterwards married a gentleman called Hautefeuille. People said she was almost desperate."¹ The last remark is significant, for Mademoiselle was notoriously not naïve. Therefore it is but just to rectify her assertion. It was not till two years later that Catherine de Saint-Remi married—on April 26, 1665—Germain Texier d'Hautefeuille, Baron of Malicorne, eighteen years her senior.

Such was the fate of La Vallière's friend, and *she* had stayed at home. We can therefore estimate the kind of succour that Louise might expect from her amazing family. Weak, isolated, neglected, she yielded to her fate—which was all the more inevitable because Louis, disillusioned of coquetry by Mlle de La Motte-Houdancourt, had humbly implored her

¹ Texier d'Hautefeuille, son of a Councillor of the Parliament, was the grandson of Marie Perrot, step-sister of Jean de Chaulnes, Lord of Bures. About 1689, he was married again to Françoise de Médavy de Grancey (LA CHESNAYE DES BOIS, *Dict: de la noblesse* v. xviii, p. 885).

forgiveness. La Vallière was angry at first, and, it was said, treated the King "like a Basque." This was unexpected, and invested her with fresh attractions. She forgave at last, "and for a long time," says a contemporary, "Louise lived a quiet life."¹ We shall see what "a long time" means.

Actually there *was* no trace of an intrigue for a whole month! Just then the King was getting fonder and fonder of Versailles. He wanted to have a portrait of Louise, painted by Noret, to hang there,² and he frequently brought her out. While the canvas was growing into beauty, they frolicked like holiday-children. "The King goes often to Versailles," wrote malicious Guy-Patin, "and people say that it isn't only the beauties of the place which take him there." Louis still kept his secret closely. To fend off gossips and bores, he had arranged that no one should follow him on these little expeditions unless he had been accorded the privilege of wearing the Blue Cloak. This was a cloak of blue watered-silk, trimmed with gold and silver embroidery, like one which the King often wore.³ Thanks to this quasi-uniform, it was easy to establish a useful *alibi*, to complicate or to explain situations, as the case might be. The idea may well have originated in some romantic tale of the period.

When Louis could not go to see his mistress, he wrote to her—sometimes in prose, sometimes in verse. Then, as this took up a great deal of his time, he called in the aid of discreet and friendly pens.

¹ MME DE LA FAYETTE. This passage proves that that part of the *Histoire* was put together before 1667.

² The portrait cost 220 livres. See FLOQUET, *Bossuet, précepteur du Dauphin*, p. 460.

³ *Mémoires de Roger de Rabutin*, v. II, p. 133. Lalanne edition. Saint-Simon says that this cloak was invented in the early days of La Vallière's favour (*Mémoires de Dangeau*, v. I. p. 393, note).

Dangeau has been hinted at, besides a less illustrious individual. Louise, only too well versed in gallant lore, at first answered as best she could; then, embarrassed, overwhelmed, is said to have called in Dangeau also.¹ The wits of the time, and other writers far less refined, willingly constituted themselves the secretaries of the two lovers. The authentic documents have perished,² and we do not regret it. In love-affairs like this, spontaneous, disinterested, utterly uncalculating, the lovers never say anything of importance, and that is far better than arguments and sophistry. But we may quote some verses, graceful and facile enough :

"Qui les sçaura, mes secrettes amours ?
Je me ris des soupçons, je me ris des discours.
Quoique l'on parle et que l'on cause,
Nul ne sçaura mes secrettes amours,
Que celle qui les cause."

And the no less attractive reply :

"Sire le Roi, qui commandez en France,
Et qui réglez la Cour,
Faites des lois contre la médisance
En faveur de l'amour,
Les médisans gâtent tout le mystère;
C'est là votre affaire
A vous
C'est là votre affaire."

Then there follow some rather poor lines—poor enough to have come from a Royal pen! Louis is said to have written them on a Two of Diamonds. La Vallière duly replied :

¹ According to Fontenelle, *Éloges des académiciens*, it was Madame whom Dangeau thus assisted; but this is improbable. The intrigue between Louis and Henrietta was too short-lived.

² We do not notice here the apocryphal notes in the *Hist: amour: des Gauls*. M. l'Abbé Duclos has diligently sought for a note from Louis XIV. to his mistress, beginning with these words: *Palsambleu, mademoiselle*. He is angry with the possessor of this precious autograph because it has not been given to history. Let him keep it, *palsambleu*! let him keep it!

"Pour m'écrire avec plus de douceur
Il fallait choisir un deux de cœur :
Les carreaux ne sont faits, il me semble,
Que pour servir Jupiter en courroux ;
Mais deux cœurs, qui sont unis ensemble,
Ne peuvent rien annoncer que de doux."¹

Towards the end of October, Louise fell ill. It was nothing serious, but it interrupted the gaieties. The topical songster, Loret, thought this worth chronicling in the *Gazette rimée* :

"La Cour est en bonne santé,
Je n'y sçache aucun alité,
Sinon l'aimable demoiselle
Que de La Vallière on appelle,
De Madame, fille d'honneur,
Et qui possède le bon heur
D'infiniment charmer et plaire
Par son mérite extr'ordinaire.
Mais pour elle on fait tant de vœux
Qu'assurément croire je veux
Que le Ciel prendra pitié d'elle,
Et que les yeux de cette Belle,
Ses grâces, ses chastes attraits,
Rebrilleront mieux que jamais."

Louise must have felt slightly confused by this eulogy of her "*chastes attraits*." For the rest, she was soon—with the beginning of November, indeed—rehearsing a shepherdess's part in the new ballet.

But now came a doleful reminder of the realities of life. On November 18, 1662, the Queen had given birth to a Princess, Anne-Elizabeth. Couriers were sent to all the Courts of Europe with the joyful tidings, and all the Courts sent special ambassadors to carry their felicitations. But the earliest arrival—he of Spain—found only a little coffin. Anne-Elizabeth had died on December 30. It was the first experience Louis had had of a personal loss ; and before the

¹ *Nouveau Siècle de Louis XIV.*, v. IV. pp. 19, 16 ; Paris, 1793. None of the pieces published in this, or in any subsequent collection, has been the subject of really critical examination. The couplets *Sire le Roy* are given as "*A feigned letter from the King of Spain to his daughter*." They were composed as an allusion to the "*feigned letter*."

spectacle of the tiny creature thus caught away as soon as given, he was profoundly moved. His anguish was the more remarkable because he had hitherto been suspected of some want of feeling.¹ After this sudden sorrow, the King and Queen retired to Saint-Cloud, where Monsieur lived. This meant that they were under the roof of Madame, among whose maids-of-honour was still Louise de La Vallière. How the contemporary libels, the exaggerative *Gazettes*, would have prized any authentic account of what the King and La Vallière said to one another during this mournful interval, and how such accounts would surprise the present writer if they did not relate that tender-hearted Louise shed many tears over the child of Marie-Thérèse!

So ended the year 1662. If the girl had pondered all the happenings since her arrival at Court, she would perhaps have found that they were more grievous than delightful; but she was at an age when a thousand hours of vexation, anxiety, jealousy, remorse, are blotted out of the memory, as if they had never been and could never be again, when once a happy day has dawned.

¹ Mme DE MOTTEVILLE, v. IV. p. 325. But see especially the *Mémoire* by Colbert, inserted in the Appendix, v. VI. p. 446, of the *Recueil* published by Monsieur CLÉMENT. The editor has put a note of interrogation after the name of "Madame." There is no reason for this. The allusion is to the little Madame Anne-Elizabeth.

CHAPTER VI

JANUARY, 1663—OCTOBER, 1663

LESS than a week after the funeral of the little Princess, the claims of royal life, which preclude long indulgence in grief, revived the festivities and gay doings. On January 8, 1663, the ballet of the *Les* was given at the Palais-Royal. As usual, the spectators were provided with a rhymed libretto by Benserade, filled with allusions.

The King entered as a shepherd, and Benserade said :

"Voici la gloire et l'honneur du hameau,

"Et quoiqu'il soit dans l'Age où nous sentons
Pour le plaisir une attache si forte,
Ne croyez pas que son plaisir l'emporte ;
Il en revient toujours à ses moutons.

"À son labeur il passe tout d'un coup.
Il n'ira pas dormir sur la fougère
Ni s'oublier auprès d'une bergère
Jusques au point d'en oublier le loup."

Flattery was never more akin to truth. For eighteen months Louis, deeply as he loved La Vallière, had been conscious of an even greater love for his own authority and for the honour of France—regarding himself, indeed, almost as the incarnation of his country. These couplets of Benserade's touched, in their airy way, upon everything that mattered—upon Spain's having yielded precedence upon the restoration of Dunkirk, upon the re-establishment of order in finan-

cial affairs, and upon the admirably drawn-up military lists. The nonchalant poet admired the King's aptitude for work. Colbert, that indefatigable toiler, was no less astonished at seeing his Sovereign come away from the most serious Cabinet Councils, quite fresh, active, and keen for amusement. All contemporaries, both friends and enemies, have recognised in Louis XIV. the remarkable faculty, peculiar to very gifted men, of being able to concentrate or relax their attention at will, of keeping up their strength merely by varying its direction; indeed, Louis' very distractions were strenuous.

In 1662, he made La Grande Mademoiselle quite ill with fatigue by insisting upon her dancing in the ballet of *Hercule*. "As for the King," wrote the Venetian Ambassador, "he is so strong and vigorous that both before and after a ball he goes to the riding-school, or else exercises with the lance, or at the *jeu de tête*."

In the ballet of *Les Arts*, Mlle de La Vallière played a Shepherdess and an Amazon. Benserade expressed himself again with much tact:

"Non, sans doute, il n'est pas de bergère plus belle
Pour elle cependant qui s'ose déclarer?
La presse n'est pas grande à soupirer pour elle
Quoiqu'elle soit si propre à faire soupirer.

"Elle a dans ses beaux yeux une douce langueur,
Et bien qu'en apparence aucun n'en soit la cause,
Pour peu qu'il fût permis de fouiller dans son cœur
On ne laisserait pas d'y trouver quelque chose.

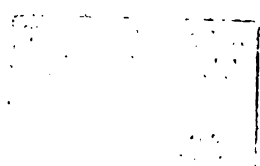
"Mais pourquoi là-dessus s'étendre davantage?
Suffit qu'on ne sauroit en dire trop de bien;
Et je ne pense pas que dans tout le village
Il se rencontre un cœur mieux placé que le sien."

Past-master in the art of saying nothing, yet implying everything, Benserade pleased the Court with these happy allusions, while taking care *not* to displease the King, who surrounded his love with so much mystery.

After the picture attributed to P. Mignard.

LOUIS XIV., MADAME, AND HER MAIDS OF HONOUR.





Loret also embalmed her in the following verse :

" L'agréable de La Vallière
Qui d'une excellente manière,
Et d'un air plus divin qu' humain
Dansa, la houlette à la main ;
Puis après changeant la cadence,
En amazone avec la lance,
Ayant le port et la fierté
D'une Belle de qualité."

Louise de La Vallière occupied in reality the most mediocre position, although she was the object of so many ovations, and of so much jealousy and intrigue. She no longer rendered the ordinary duties of her position to Madame, but she still remained one of her maids. She had one little room in the garrets of the Castle, and, except for a few jewels and fripperies, she had no love-tokens from the King. At this time Louis XIV., whose poverty-stricken days were only just over, was anything but lavish ; and besides, our proud and delicate-minded Louise asked only love for love. She did not even make a virtue of her discretion. This girl of seventeen, already tortured by remorse, and, when remorse had passed, preyed upon by anxiety—this favourite, less favoured than the meanest of beggars, lived for two years a life so narrow and constrained that the lowest chambermaid would have refused to submit to it.

The King could not doubt the love of a mistress who asked for nothing. One day, during a review, he saw her smiling pleasantly at a young cadet, who bowed to her as if they were old acquaintances. The same evening her tyrannical lover asked Louise, in a severe tone, who the young man was. Louise got confused, and finally replied that he was her brother. The King, with his usual caution, made inquiries, and found that Louise was as truthful as she was disinterested.¹

¹ *Les loisirs d'un ministre, ou Essais dans le goût de ceux de*

Louise's eldest brother, Jean-François de La Baume Le Blanc, was, after his father's death, sent to the College at Navarre, where we see him in 1665 figuring in a representation of the life of Saint Julian. Although amongst these young actors we find the names of Bretoncelle and D'Humières, it would be rash to conclude from that that it was in such exclusive society that Laurent's son made his social début, for we also find there such middle-class patronymics as Menardeau and Beauvais. Jean-François was poor, and poverty is as much of a class-distinction amongst children at school as it is later in the world. Neither can one regard a part in a Latin piece at College, nor an echo in the *Gazette de Loiret*, precisely as the clarion-call of Fame!

In 1659, the youth was made Lieutenant to the King at Amboise, a small appointment, worth only about 600 *livres* a year. He did not receive Foucquet when he was brought back to Paris from imprisonment at Nantes. It seems possible, then, that what d'Argenson says may be true: that the young soldier, who had made his first campaign as a cadet of the King's Household, was still, in 1663, personally quite unknown to Louis. It was only then that he received the rank of Cornet in the Dauphin's Company of Light Horse, a corps recruited with exceptional care.

The young King increased the strength of his Army upon any and every pretext. He organised his son's Military Household, and included in it a company of Light Horse "magnificently recruited, equipped, and mounted," which was composed of three hundred and fifteen officers, re-embodied after the

Montaigne, written in 1736, v. II. p. 195. This anecdote is disputed by MM. LEMOINE and LICHTENBERGER, *De La Vallière à Montespan*, p. 50.

Pyrenees Treaty. In reality, he was laying the foundation of an Army-Corps. The standard showed three dolphins playing in a rough sea. The motto would lead one to think that the Academy of Inscriptions already existed: it was *Pericula ludus*. The King was honorary Captain; the Lieutenant (still more honorary!) was the Dauphin, a child of two. Lemoine assures us that La Vallière, as a Cornet, was the actual commander of this company of veterans. This is unlikely; so is the precocious talent with which some credit the young man—of obtaining a *bonus* for himself upon the pay of his inferiors! Besides, Louis XIV. had given him, since January 19, 1663, a pension of four thousand *livres*.

The first months of 1663 passed without new intrigues, but they were certainly not devoid of trials. On May 28, Louis was violently attacked with measles. It was a very severe illness. At one time they feared for his life; and he, looking death in the face, made all his arrangements to that end. But when the fever fastened upon him, he babbled incessantly of his dear Louise. He did not wish to see her, though, "for fear of putting her in danger."¹ The invalid's youth and strength brought him quickly through this illness. Then came a new efflorescence of love. While Louis was in danger of death, he had probably felt anxious as to the fate of his mistress. At any rate, he now attempted to give her a better standing by consolidating her brother's fortune. This

¹ *Le Palais-Royal*, in the collection called *L'Histoire amoureuse des Gaules*, v. II. p. 45. Chaldean texts translated into Arabic, and then from Arabic into Greek, and then from Greek into French, could not contain more mistakes than these libels, copied and recopied as they were by ignorant pens. The passage quoted by us appears thus: "He dreamt continually of his mistress, who did not wish to see him for fear of putting him in danger. When he was quite out of danger, M. de Saint-Aignan went to fetch her." Evidently, the right reading must be "*whom he would not see*."

was achieved by a very rich marriage with a young Breton heiress, Gabrielle Glé de la Cotardais (June 12, 1663), the orphan and only daughter of Jean Glé de la Cotardais and Marie de Montigny. She was of the Breton nobility on both sides, heiress to 40,000 *livres* a year ("useful even for a prince"), had been courted, or rather disputed about, for four years, for Mazarin himself had made a note of her for one of his "*combinazione*"! But fate had reserved her for Jean-François, who for six months (January to June, 1663), paid court to her "with all respect and courtesy, most assiduously." The contract, very prudently drawn up, was signed on June 11 by the King, which is not surprising, by the Queen, which *is*, by the Queen-mother, by Monsieur and Madame, by the Prince de Condé, the Duc d'Enghien, and by a hand which traced two shapeless capitals, an L. and a D., a baby-hand, no other than the Dauphin's, who was then eighteen months old, and thus bore witness to his satisfaction with the good services of the Cornet of his company!¹ Sixty lords and ladies of the highest importance also testified to their esteem for the favourite's brother. The select set was followed by a dense crowd, hurrying to the marriage-ceremony, which was celebrated in the Church of the Assumption, by Monseigneur the Bishop of Laon.

This public mark of favour re-awakened the rancour of the Comtesse de Soissons, the Comtesse de Vardes, and their husbands, who decided to tell the Queen herself all that was going on at the Palais-Royal.

It would appear incredible, but is nevertheless true, that though more than two years had gone by, Marie-

¹ This is told in full in the *Gazette de Loret*. M. Lemoine has given us some details. M. Le Brun points out that the document was preserved among M. Delapalme's papers.

Thérèse did not yet exactly know who was the object of the King's passion, and it is impossible to think that it was an affected ignorance. The Queen was incapable of such calculation. Neither was it stupidity, as some believe. When the King's affection for her began to wane, she was perfectly aware of it. She was Spanish and jealous, but Spanish with the pride of race, and jealous as a true Queen may be. Her frank, honest mind detested espionage, the gossip of Court-life, and the tattle of servants. Therefore her suspicions nearly always led her astray, sometimes falling upon Madame, sometimes upon La Motte-Houdancourt. "It was pitiable to see what the Queen was imagining; one laughed about it with the King." And who laughed? who but Mademoiselle de Montpensier, a person utterly inferior to the noble woman at whom she jeered.

On the other hand, Marie-Thérèse's true friends (it would not have been necessary to enlarge the Louvre to put *them* up!) refused to worry her with useless revelations. A conspiracy of silence was entered into by Anne of Austria, the faithful Modena, the reserved and austere Mme de Navailles, and the kindly and intelligent Mme de Motteville.

One evening the latter, returning from her little domain in Normandy, and somewhat afraid of having lost the thread of events at Court, was destined to be sufficiently astonished. She was by the Queen's bedside, and the Queen had just been confined of the little Madame Anne-Elizabeth, so it must have been about the end of November, 1662. Suddenly Marie-Thérèse signed to her with a look, and pointed out Mlle de La Vallière. (It denotes the peculiar discomfort of the Royal apartments that Louise should have had to pass through this room on her way to sup with the Comtesse de Soissons, with whom she

had established some real or pretended friendship.) "*Esta donzella*," said the Queen in Spanish, "*con las arracadas de diamante es esta que el Re quiere*." ("That girl with the diamond earrings is the one the King loves.")¹ Her companion—true Norman that she was!—though utterly taken aback, replied in an equivocal manner, saying neither yes nor no, but "that all husbands, without ceasing to love their wives, were generally unfaithful in this way, or made pretence of being so, as it was quite the fashion nowadays." Marie-Thérèse did not reply, and Mme de Motteville could gather nothing from her silence. She was not, however, long in relating the whole occurrence to Queen Anne, who showed herself, as always, the most prudent and tender of mothers.

It is a pleasure, in writing this history, so romantic in form yet so veracious even in its smallest details, to speak of the kindness of Anne of Austria and her unflagging care for her daughter-in-law's ease of mind. On the last day of the Carnival of 1663, the King had publicly refused to take the Queen to the masked ball, "preferring to accompany La Vallière." Marie-Thérèse, still ignorant of the real reason, was so mortified that her mother-in-law promised to take her to the ball. Anne spent the morning of the day chosen for this great festivity at the Grandes-Carmélites, the convent in the Rue d'Enfer, which we have so often mentioned, and which will be the scene of our closing chapters. She spent the whole day quietly there. In the evening, suddenly remembering her promise, she threw over her dress a Spanish cloak of black taffeta and went to fetch the Queen

¹ *Quiere* is usually translated as *aime*; but this may here be giving the word too much significance. It could also be translated as *recherche*, and such is the meaning that Marie-Thérèse probably attached to it. Otherwise we could not understand one or two passages later in the *Mémoires de Madame de Motteville*.

from Mme de Motteville's room in the Palais-Royal. Following her was a "beautiful group of masks, dressed in antique fashion." When the time came, they drove to the Palace of Madame and Monsieur, who were giving the ball. Everything went well ; but they had forgotten certain bigoted folk who had much to say on the topic. It is said that even Mme Scarron, who had in 1660 so much admired the happiness of Marie-Thérèse (and who was a widow now, living on a pension from the Queen-mother), declared that she couldn't conceive "how an honest woman *could* wear a mask." Anne of Austria, humiliated by the censure, confessed that "her affection for the Queen had been too powerful on this occasion." But if Marie-Thérèse occasionally amused herself—who can blame her? She wept often enough—"so often that Mme de Navailles was so courageous as to beg the King to have pity upon her." The King, accustomed to be master in his Kingdom, intended to be master also of all minds, all wills, and all hearts—and one not only to be loved, but to be feared. He replied "as a peremptory husband who disliked opposition of any kind."

It was at this moment that Olympe Mancini recommenced her attempts at revenge upon the favourite. She had been clever enough to interest Madame Henriette, whom Marie-Thérèse, in her ignorance, accused of leading the King astray, because he was always to be seen at her house. He was really attracted thither only by La Vallière. Still vexed at not having been able to keep his love, and even more annoyed "at being detested for another," Henrietta agreed with the Countess to denounce, directly and unmistakably, the Royal infidelities to the unfortunate Marie-Thérèse, who, suspicious but not indiscreet, feared everything and knew nothing. Strengthened by this alliance, the

astute Italian asked and obtained a secret interview with the Queen in the parlour of the Petites Carmélites, in the Rue du Bouloi. She recounted, in her own way, the love-affair between the King and La Vallière, and, what was more, told her of the fascination attempted by La Motte-Houdancourt.

This shot had scarcely carried when, leaving Marie-Thérèse in distress, Madame de Soissons fled to tell everything to Louis. She added (true niece of Mazarin!) that she had found the Queen already instructed by the Duchesse de Navailles, so that it was this poor lady and Marie-Thérèse who had to bear the brunt of his attack. The King, at bedtime, told the Lady-of-Honour that he knew all. She tried to justify herself, but blundered hopelessly. The only change Louis made in his conduct was that "instead of telling the Queen every day that he had come from Madame's, he now freely confessed that he had been elsewhere."

One evening in the following winter, "the King, who had been with La Vallière from midday until four o'clock in the morning, came to lie down; he found the Queen in her petticoat, sitting before the fire with Mme de Chevreuse. As he was still angry with her about La Vallière, he asked her, with intense coldness, why she was not in bed. 'I was waiting for you,' she answered sadly. 'You seem to imply that you wait for me very often,' replied the King. 'And so I do,' she answered; 'for you no longer care for me; you seem to care more for my enemies.' The King looked at her with a haughtiness amounting to contempt, and said mockingly, 'Alas, madame, that you should have learnt so many things!' and, in leaving her, 'Go to bed, madame, and don't argue so much.' The Queen was so overwhelmed that she rushed pleadingly towards the King, who was striding

about the room. 'Well, madame, what do you wish to say?' he asked her. 'I want to tell you that I love you always, whatever you do to me,' replied the Queen. 'And I,' said the King, 'I will manage so well that you shall be no longer troubled; but if you wish to please me, you must cease all communication with Mme de Soissons and Mme de Navailles'—because he knew that they had talked of La Vallière."¹

Beneath this picture, so life-like that it must be true, one ought to write, in the form of a legend, one of the excellent Mme de Motteville's reflections: "The misfortune of our sex is such that men, who have made the laws, have removed all rigour from them as regards themselves; and it is only in Heaven, where all are equal, that each shall be rewarded according to his deserts." We can add nothing to this just and pious reflection, but can only commend it to the notice of that sex which still makes the laws!

It was towards the beginning of July, 1663, that Mme de Soissons had denounced the King to Marie-Thérèse. The Italian woman was ignorant then of the fact that there was a new bond between Louis and his mistress. Louise was about to become a mother. For a long time the secret was kept between herself and the King; but in August Louis was obliged to go to the Siege of Marsal, in Lorraine, and he wished, before his departure, to ensure the well-being of his mistress.

Proud and peremptory as he was, he had never forgotten his respect for his mother. In all probability, this was the first-fruit of his many illegitimate love-

¹ *Hist: amour: des Gaules.* This passage is also found in *Le Palais-Royal, ou les amours de Mlle de La Vallière.*

affairs. His mistress was even more desirous to conceal it than he was. They were both beset with anxiety.

Saint-Aignan had been usually employed by Louis in his escapades ; but now, by a very characteristic impulse, he appealed to quite a different sort of man. Jean-Baptiste Colbert "had a naturally scowling face. His hollow eyes and thick black eyebrows gave him a sinister air, and made him at first sight seem fierce and unprepossessing ; but in the end he was found to be most thoroughly reliable. The Cardinal had recommended him to the King as a trustworthy man—an excellent creature, who would be entirely faithful to him." Louis' thoughts now turned towards this man, whose solid qualities he had for long appreciated. Colbert was quick at taking a hint, and placed himself and his wife at the King's disposal. By a coincidence which had probably not escaped the memory of the lovers, Madame Colbert was partly a country-woman of Louise's. Daughter of Jacques Charon (Lord of Ménars and Bailiff of Blois) and Marie Begnon, whose family had been esteemed in the Blois country, she must have known the La Vallières or the Saint-Remis ; moreover, she was a kindly woman, and very expert in the rearing of children, having brought up seven of her own.¹

Louis, now definitely at war with the Duc de Lorraine, left for Marsal on August 25, and this expedition, his first military attempt, lasted until October 15. For two months he incessantly corresponded with his mistress. Colbert conveyed these letters from the King : "Those with no superscription, forward to the person I mentioned on leaving. You

¹ Mazarin, a good judge, had already noticed these qualities, and had recommended his nieces to make the acquaintance of this sensible woman.

understand." On September 1, the King wrote : "I address the letters for the Queens to you ; and you know all about those that have no address."

On his return, he decided to take Louise away from Madame's apartments. This was not difficult, for, after two years of persistent love, nobody could think it strange that the King should free his mistress from such an equivocal position, as painful to her as it was wounding to Henrietta. A certain Brion—some-time a dandy but now very much on the wane, who died just in time to escape ridicule—having wanted to marry Menneville, that tool of Foucquet's, had had a pleasure-house of the type later called the *Folies*, built in the garden of the Palais-Royal. It was on that side where to-day runs the Rue Richelieu, at the top of the old Rue des Bouchers. This so-called palace was about seventy-two feet long, and twenty-four feet wide ! It was a simple little erection of one storey. The King bought it, furnished it richly, and gave the "Palais Brion" to La Vallière,¹ who lived there "in a very retired manner, never going out, and dressed always in a loose robe. Those whom she received in the evenings for card-playing saw her only in bed."

Colbert succeeded in finding a confidential maid, the *demoiselle* du Plessis ; "then, through this young lady, he had all the necessary baby-linen brought into the house." But we must let him speak for himself. "For the bringing-up of this child in the secrecy which the King has enjoined upon me, I have arranged with Beauchamp and his wife, two old servants of my family, who live in the Rue aux Ours, at the corner of the street which runs behind Saint-Leu-Saint-Gilles. I have told them, as a secret, that my

¹ We found in the *Bibliothèque nationale*, in the Engraving Department, a plan of the Palais Brion.

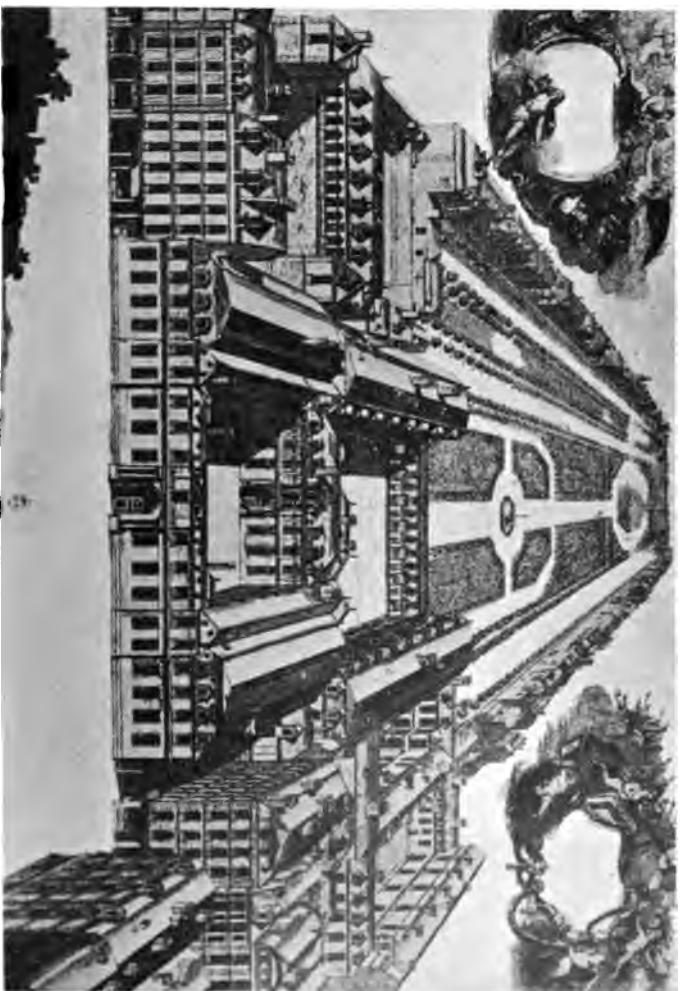
brother is about to have a child by a lady of rank, and that to save her honour I am obliged to take care of it, and am going to entrust it to their care. They have gladly accepted this proposal."

As a last and indispensable precaution, the accoucheur Boucher was warned. Two cautious notes (not a name mentioned ; Louise was *la personne*, Boucher *l'homme*) prove that Louis was most solicitous about his mistress's condition. He was with her when the pains began ; but at that supreme moment when a woman longs to clasp the hand of the man who has made her a mother, Louis was obliged to be absent.

It was December 18, 1663. He instructed Boucher to send him news by Colbert. That very day his Royal duties took him out hunting. On Wednesday the 19, at 3.30 a.m.,¹ Boucher sent this note : " We have a boy, who is very strong. The mother and child are doing well, thank God. I await orders." And such orders as they were ! The mother kept her son for less than three hours. At six o'clock in the morning, before it was light, according to agreement, Boucher carried the child across the Palais-Royal, and, in obedience to his instructions, gave him to Beauchamp and his wife, "who were waiting at the crossway, opposite the Hôtel Bouillon." The same day the newly-born infant was carried to Saint-Leu, and, by the King's secret orders, named Charles, son of M. de Lincourt and of *damoiselle* Elizabeth de Beux. He had for godfather Gury Focart, otherwise Beauchamp, and for godmother Clémence Pré, Beauchamp's wife.²

¹ Colbert adds : " Three days after the full moon of the same month of December, which was on the 14th." People had not yet given up astrologically observing the hour of birth.

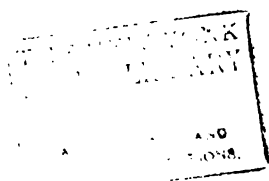
² See *Réflexions sur la miséricorde de Dieu*, v. II. p. 201, in which is reproduced the piece entitled *Particularités secrètes de la vie du roy*.



After a drawing by J. A. Bachelier.

+ Palais Brion.

THE PALAIS-ROYAL IN 1679.



Despite all precautions, the eyes of the whole Court were turned upon Louise. They began to tell romantic stories. One night Boucher had been fetched in a carriage and conducted blindfolded to a room where lay a masked lady, whose happy delivery he accomplished; then, again blindfolded, he had been brought back to his house and handsomely paid. He himself had told it at Mme de Villeroy's. Who could this lady be except La Vallière, who had received nobody for four days, and whom they had seen, *after* four days, "still in bed"? They added that "on Wednesday morning M. Colbert had gone to the King, who was still in bed, and had talked with him for a long time. It was like the beginning of a novel." In this manner does the serious Olivier d'Ormesson express himself, and in this manner the legend has overrun history!

Louise, feeling herself observed, made a valiant effort to save appearances, and was courageous enough, on December 24, to attend Midnight Mass at the Quinze-Vingts. She was described as "very pale," and "much changed"—"nobody could doubt that she had had a son, who, rumour said, was being taken care of by Mme de Choisy." Always the same web of mistakes! The King would never have given his confidence to that intriguing person.

And so the first-born of Louis XIV. and Louise de La Vallière came into the world. A mother without

In face of so authentic a text we must repudiate the mention made by genealogists of a *Louis de Bourbon*, born December 27, 1663. As to Louis, son of Laurent Limoisin, whom the editor of *L'Histoire amoureuse des Gaules* (v. II. p. 46, Paris edition, 1857) considers to have been a natural son of the King's, we are convinced that he was really the son of Laurent Limoisin. The account of the baptism, quoted by this editor, permits no possibility of doubt. How can we imagine for a moment that Anne of Austria would have been godmother to a bastard of the King? And further, how could the King possibly have been godfather to his own son?

a husband, a father without a child, a child without either father or mother—these three had to submit to the inexorable moral laws which govern our world. What cruel humiliations await those who revolt against the established order of things!

SECOND PART

1663—1666



CHAPTER I

END OF 1663—DECEMBER, 1664

WITH the year 1664 begins the second period of the favourite's life—that life so envied, yet in reality so sad. To the attics of the Tuileries and of the Palais-Royal, wherein—less than the King's desire—the mocking eyes and satirical tongues of the Court-ladies had made her prefer to immure herself, there had now succeeded her own small house. But here, in a different form, she encountered the same vexations.

Her love for Louis and her maternal duties would have satisfied her ; but the sovereign's multifarious occupations kept him away, and the child, hidden at a distance, could only be seen in secret. What, then, was to brighten the solitude of the Hôtel Brion ? A few gentlemen, who hoped to please their lord by coming to play cards with his mistress ! No ladies. For her only companion, the d'Artigny girl—who had no reputation left, who had come to Court the expectant mother of a nameless child ; intelligent enough, but low-minded, and less of a confidante than of a spy. Except for a certain external elegance, Louise's life was almost that of a kept-woman.

There is a scandal attaching to this epoch, as might have been expected. The house was very small. La Vallière's apartments occupied the first and only storey. There the King and his intimates played *reversi* or

brelan, as it happened to please His Majesty. The officers on duty, the guards, those courtiers who were excluded from the Royal tables, would remain on the ground-floor, in a little drawing-room which looked on to the garden of the Palais-Royal. Therein had been installed card- and billiard-tables, so that they could make some attempts at amusement. One evening, during a game of *tric-trac*, an officer of the Body-guard, Busca, had some high words with his lieutenant, Talhouet, who, by way of reply, struck him with his bâton. Busca drew his sword upon him. Then there were groans from Talhouet, and a general tumult. The King was furious at the noise, and sent the Duc de Noailles to see what it was about; but Busca had escaped through the window. He was condemned to death for contumacy all the same.

"Respect for the two Queens" prevented "ladies of quality" from visiting or receiving the King's mistress, and, above all, from "belonging to her suite." Louise, when maid-of-honour to Madame, had had her appointed place in all the festivities, in all the ballets. But Louise the Royal favourite, hidden away in the Hôtel Brion, was quite a different person. And so the nymph of Fontainebleau, the graceful dancer, was given no part in the ballet of *Les Amours déguisés* (danced on February 13, 1664, at the Palais-Royal), though Mlles de Pons, de Coëtlegon, de La Motte figured in it as attendants on Flora; though Mlle de Mortemart, quite recently become Mme de Montespan, displayed her dazzling beauty in it as a sea-nymph.¹

¹ *Ballet royal des amours déguisés*, BENSERADE, *Cœuvres*, v. II. p. 316. This ballet is not by Benserade, but by the President de Périgny, then Reader to the King. See *Discours touchant la vie de M. de Benserade*, prefacing his works. See *Encyclopédie méthodique, Ballet*. This ballet was danced five or six times. See *Gazette de France*, Feb. 13, 16, 18, 20, 1664.

The time came when this constraint was to prove intolerable to the King. He was on the point of giving those famous festivities at Versailles which are known as the "Pleasures of the Enchanted Isle" (*Plaisirs de l'Île enchantée*), and he could not resist the temptation of having his mistress there, and thus displaying her publicly as the object of his passion.

Versailles, his favourite abode, had not yet undergone the transformation which, some years later, converted it into the immense Palace of our contemporary admiration. More elegant than grandiose, it was still in those days the Palace of Alcina. "And in this lovely spot, where all the Court assembled on May 5 (1664) the King entertained more than six hundred persons, besides an infinity of people necessary to the dancing and acting, and artisans of all kinds from Paris—so that it really was like a small army."

Louis began by assigning to the Marquis de La Vallière a place of honour in a bout of Tilting at the Ring. One feels a certain regret at finding the young man appear as Zerbin (May 5, 1664), bearing as arms a phoenix on a log set ablaze by the sun, with the motto: *Hoc juvat uri* ("It is joy to be consumed by such a luminary"). And, as if the allusion were not clear enough, he recited this quatrain :

"Quelques beaux sentiments que la Gloire nous donne,
Quand on est amoureux au souverain degré,
Mourir entre les bras d'une belle personne
Est de toutes les morts la plus douce à mon gré."

A moment's reflection would have shown him how unsuitable these lines must sound in the mouth of the favourite's brother. La Vallière was more dexterous than tactful : he won the tilting-prize—a sword enriched with diamonds, together with cross-belt buckles of great value, "presented to him by the Queen-mother,"

At the supper which followed the bouts, Louise sat at the Royal table, between Madame de Marsé and the d'Artigny girl. On the next day she was made remarkable in quite another way, during the performance of the tragi-comedy of *La Princesse d'Élide*. It would seem that Molière, without for an instant forgetting the respect due to the presence of the two Queens, had nevertheless the knack of flattering the Royal passion on the boards; and certain verses have become so enshrined in the legend of the love of Louis XIV. for Louise de La Vallière that they have actually been attributed—most flatteringly—to the lovers!¹

In the course of these festivities the King held a private lottery. It was his own idea; and his development of it deserves a moment's attention.

"Since I have seen you," Louis wrote to Colbert, "I have had an idea which will cost me some money, but will give pleasure to many here—and especially to the two Queens. I want to have a lottery like that one of the Cardinal's—I mean, it is to cost nobody anything, except myself. . .² I don't want it to be worth more than three thousand pistoles, which, if well laid out, ought to buy me lots of jewels; for I won't have any articles of wearing apparel. . . As no one will know anything about it, it will be all the easier for you to get things at

¹ *Le Palais-Royal, ou les Amours de Madame de La Vallière, Hist. amour: des Gaules*, v. II, p. 84. "The King wrote this on his tablets, either from memory or his own inspiration, I know not which." Cf. *La Vie de La Vallière*, pp. 230, 231, 235, where the text varies slightly. Now, did Molière accord to these lines the honour of being ranked with his own? or did the author of the *Palais-Royal* quote them, in ignorance of Molière's authorship? The only chance of solving this problem will occur when we have a good edition of the last-mentioned work.

² Louis is here alluding to some other lotteries which he authorised for the benefit of certain private persons. LORET, in his *Muse historique*, gives a highly characteristic description of one for which Mme de Beauvais distributed the tickets,

a moderate price. I should like the big prize to be worth five hundred pistoles ; and, for the others, I don't keep you to a fixed sum. I should like the handsomest things you can get at a reasonable price." Louis was afraid of annoying his economical Minister, so he tried to "meet" him in details. Moreover, though the King liked to be magnificent, the Man was still very prudent, and described himself most neatly when he said that he liked to have the handsomest things at the lowest price.

When all was arranged, Louis drew up the list of winners, and in doing so betrayed his secret desire. He wrote on it the names of the "Mlles de La Vallière." Several writers, in quoting the anecdote, have thought it necessary to correct the text; and name only Mlle de La Vallière. Louis knew what he was doing in thus mentioning together Louise and her sister-in-law (the wife of the Marquis) who was then and thus introduced at Court. From that day every one guessed the truth.

Mme de Brancas was the first to approach the favourite, and this step was the more remarkable because her husband was *chevalier d'honneur* to the Queen-mother. They were neither of them, however, people with any exaggerated sense of honour. They had been in Foucquet's pay. Some one had written confidentially to him : "As for the fat woman (the Queen-mother) Brancas and Grave will look after her for you : when one leaves her, the other instantly appears." But the Superintendent's disgrace had reacted on their fortunes. Mme Brancas, *née* Suzanne Garnier, the daughter of a Paymaster of Perquisites (*Trésorier des parties casuelles*), would have done anything to restore them ; so she "followed" La Vallière. She would not have hesitated, indeed, to put her own daughter in La Vallière's place.

When Anne of Austria learnt this, she was furious, and bitterly reproached the Countess for her base behaviour. Brancas managed to get away without answering, and hurried to the King with the story of her scolding, setting it all down to the "perfectly ridiculous" prudery of the Duchesse de Navailles. Thus, when shortly afterwards at Fontainebleau the Duc de Navailles, who commanded the Light Horse, requisitioned quarters for his troop, the King told him to get them and pay for them with his own money. "Your Majesty's servants are very unfortunate to be treated in this way," replied the old soldier. Louis dared not reply; but, when he got up to La Vallière's room, he cried: "I only just staved off a quarrel with M. de Navailles. If I had been as violent as he was——!" And then later, unable to forgive his own intimidation, he ordered that faithful servant and his wife to resign their posts.¹ In such a fashion did he dismiss two of the most honourable persons of his Court—so honourable and so high-minded that, in his *Mémoires*, the Duke does not even mention the names of his enemies.

When Louis struck a really arbitrary blow, he was always prepared for the consequences. This time he made a most singular display. With great deliberation, he replaced the upright Navailles in the Government of Havre by the complaisant Saint-Aignan. To fill the Duchess's place was not so simple; that was a delicate business, which had to do with his own daily existence. Just as he had divined the docile servant under Colbert's stern exterior, so now he selected as the new Lady-in-Waiting a woman apparently very severe, but in reality most pliant. A

¹ Certain Memoirs, by a really reputable pen, declare that Navailles had "made a good thing" out of his appointment (MOTTEVILLE, v. IV. p. 344); but the truth is that he lost money over them. See his *Mémoires*.

daughter of the famous Mlle de Rambouillet, brought up in that Hôtel, "the haunt not only of the wits, but of all the courtiers too," the most renowned abode in all the empire of the *précieuses*—Mme de Montausier, by her birth, her education, her marriage (that too, too prudent marriage with a man of terribly austere reputation !) and, finally, by her never-failing affability, had solved the difficult problem of pleasing everybody. But, beyond the universal favourite, the King's vision pierced to the woman "on the look-out," who would know exactly the right moment to be conveniently short-sighted.

Although she was no longer maid-of-honour, Louise still had her room at the Castle. In the morning, careless of public opinion, Louis would coolly, under the eyes of the two Queens, go hunting with his mistress. After dinner, he would walk with her in the gardens. This was a great change from the furtive meetings of 1661. The young monarch was indeed becoming more and more of a libertine. Monsieur having asked him if he was going to perform his religious duties at Whitsuntide, he announced that he was not ; "he had no intention of playing the hypocrite—like Monsieur, who only went to confession because the Queen-mother wished it." There was a marked coolness between the King and Anne of Austria. They barely spoke to one another. One day, Monsieur and Mademoiselle arranged to leave them alone together, hoping that the *tête-à-tête* would result in a reconciliation. But Louis stood leaning against a window for a moment, then, with a low bow to his mother, he withdrew. The poor lady, swallowing her sobs, fled from the courtly crowd, and refused to appear at supper. Next morning, Señora Molina, coming into her oratory,

found her again in tears. Molina was discreet, and tried to retire, but Anne of Austria made a sign to her to stay and kneel beside her. Then, looking tearfully at the faithful creature : "Ah, Molina !" she said, expressing her grief in two words, "*estos hijos !*" ("These children !")

However, as her confessor had ordered her to speak first to the King, Anne curbed her pride. But Louis, on his side, "had not slept all night." "Dissatisfied with himself," "feeling himself in fault," he too was ready to take the first step : in his turn, he humbly begged for pardon. He even said to Le Tellier that his love for his mother "would have obliged him to do anything that was necessary for a reconciliation with her." Anything ! 'Twas the phrase of a day—for-gotten the day after. Anne of Austria, mistakenly thinking the moment a favourable one, pointed out to the King "that he was intoxicated with his own greatness, and set no limits either to his desire or his revenge." Dwelling on the "danger to his salvation," she begged of him to *will*, at least, to break the chains which bound him. He replied "that he knew his errors, that he sometimes felt grieved at them and ashamed of them, that he had done what he could to keep himself from offending God ; but he was obliged to confess that his passions had out-stepped his reason, he could not resist them, and could not even say that he desired to do so." This was such a frank avowal that it cut short every remonstrance ; nor was it all. Louis believed in the maxim that "in difficult interviews, it is not enough to set things right again ; one must gain some advantage that one had formerly lacked." In other words, after having repulsed an invasion, it is your turn to invade ! He therefore told his mother that "he had long fought against the desire to ask ladies

of quality to 'follow' Mlle de La Vallière, but had at last resolved to do so, and begged her not to oppose him." The defeated Anne of Austria could think of no reply, except that it was at least something to know that one was wrong, and that she begged him to pray to God for the further grace of good-will. While awaiting this, Louis proceeded as before. He was to be seen every afternoon walking in the Terrace-gardens, followed by all the gentlemen of his Court, with Louise by his side—Louise, then in the full flower of her beauty.¹

Very evident indeed was the change in the once timid and cautious young sovereign; and soon he went further, and resolved to have, once for all, a full regal explanation with the Queen. Towards the end of the September of this year (1664), having to stay for a few days with his brother at Villers-Cotterets, he decided to take Louise with him to join the little family party. The Queen was pregnant, and therefore was obliged to remain behind at Vincennes. She heard of this project, and the night before he left, the King found her bathed in tears in her oratory. He told her, coolly enough, that he sympathised with her troubles, and, by way of perfect consolation, went on to promise her that when he was thirty he would settle down and be a model husband. (He was then twenty-six, so a short four years of indulgence was all he asked). . . With that he departed, and his mistress with him—"and everything went on as usual," which means that he had a pleasant visit with Louise, while Anne of Austria looked after the humiliated Marie-Thérèse.

And so La Vallière became publicly the favourite. The great ladies "followed" her. She was formally

¹ "Mlle de La Vallière was looking very handsome then" (Mlle DE MONTPENSIER, v. IV. p. 3).

presented by the King to Madame, her one-time arrogant and jealous mistress, and we must confess that she showed no reluctance¹ to mount that left-handed throne which, later on, she was to speak of as her "scaffold." From that day forward, she was courted by all, and she lost her head at last. Till then, however, the insult to the two Queens had been merely an indirect one. They could look away, or stay in their rooms, when Louis was promenading the garden with Louise. The Castle of Vincennes was to witness the supreme affront to these two illustrious ladies.

On his return from Villers-Cotterets, one October evening (between October 1 and 19, 1664), the King brought his mistress into the Queen-mother's room and sat down with her to play cards, their partners being Monsieur his brother, and Madame. He had chosen his day well, showing that discretion which is the better part of valour, for both Anne of Austria and Marie-Thérèse were keeping their rooms. 'Twas an assault by surprise! The Queen was furious when she heard of "that girl's" intrusion, and sent Madame de Motteville to Anne of Austria; but Madame de Motteville met Madame de Montausier in the corridor. "The Queen-mother," exclaimed the new Lady-in-Waiting, "has acted admirably in having consented to see La Vallière. It shows that she is a very clever woman, and a good tactician as well. But she is so weak that we can scarcely hope that she will carry through her good beginning." *Had* the Queen-mother consented to see La Vallière, as the complaisant Montausier supposed? It is extremely doubtful. Anne had just been badly beaten, and no doubt thought it useless to give battle again, so, speechlessly, she resigned herself to suffering with her daughter-in-law.

¹ "She desired it" (Mme DE MOTTEVILLE). The libellists say the same.

At the moment of passion's victory over conscience, an incident supervened which might have despoiled the triumphant young lady of all her prestige, and caused the romance of her life to end in vulgar commonplace.

Less patient than Anne of Austria, Marie-Thérèse had been profoundly disturbed by the "creature's" intrusion into her Palace. Her nerves suffered badly, and the physical reaction declared itself by violent internal pains. One month afterwards, the Queen was prematurely delivered of a daughter.¹ It was a terrible ordeal, and she thought she was going to die. All the last rites had been performed, and the poor Queen (who was so entirely worthy of her high place) declared that her one regret was "for the King," whom she loved in spite of all—and "for that woman" (*y esta muger*), she added, pointing to the Queen-mother. Louis XIV., "carrying out those astonishing contradictions of character which were as remarkable in him as in all other men, seemed deeply grieved." He said to the Maréchal de Villeroi "that although it was a great grief to him to lose a child, he would be consoled for that if God, in His mercy, would spare the Queen—and let the child live long enough to be baptized."² The child—such a child!

¹ Marie-Anne, born Nov. 16, 1664; died Dec. 26, 1664. Mme de Motteville must be mistaken in saying the Queen was well by Nov. 18.

² Mme DE MOTTEVILLE, v. IV. p. 363. Here again the novelists, who are important as giving the general tenor of public opinion, render the facts "with a difference" but with quite colourable probability. They bring Mme de Montausier on the scene (she thoroughly deserves a place in these compositions!) and represent her as trying to convince the Queen that it was her duty to receive La Vallière. "'But, madame,' interrupted the Queen, 'how is it even conceivable that I should receive the girl? I love the King—and the King loves only her.' The King, who was on the watch, entered suddenly; the Queen was so amazed at the sight of him that she blushed violently, and it brought on bleeding at the nose. . . Three days later she was delivered of a little hairy, swarthy girl; and she nearly died of it."

Swarthy, hairy—terrible to behold. . . 'Twas whispered that the Queen had been stared at by a young Moor. The unfortunate baby died almost at birth ; but, short as its life had been, the monstrous apparition had horrified every one, and afflicted the Royal Family beyond words.

It is said that then the young Queen, tortured by jealousy, begged her much-moved and deeply saddened husband to get La Vallière married. The King was taken by surprise ; he knew not what to say. But he could not promise, neither did he dare to refuse his wife's dying request ; so at last he said "that he would not oppose it ; *they* might look for a match for her if they liked." He promised, in fact, to be neutral. And that was all "they" asked.

As if this story were dedicated to the improbable—to whom was Louise now offered ? To Vardes, her deadliest enemy ! It is true that the two Queens, nay, even the King himself, were as yet unaware of his abominable machinations. But if any one were likely to be antipathetic to simple, frank Louise, surely it must have been this pretentious and artificial personage. The story is confused just here. Most reports affirm that everybody refused her, and that Vardes, despite the bait of a million *livres*, refused her also : not from delicacy, for he was the son of a mistress of Henri IV. ; not from fear of any further attentions from the King, for, as he did not love La Vallière, the King would have done him a favour in seducing her afresh. His refusal was prompted by no such small matters ; the fact was that he loved some one else.¹

¹ *Le Palais-Royal: Hist: amour: des Gaules*, v. II. p. 60, Boileau edition. Since we are referring to this edition, we must point out that note 2, on page 60, is erroneous. As to the text itself, it is very corrupt. It begins by reporting an incident of the year 1664 (that of the birth of the little "Moorish" baby), and ends by giving, as a consequence of the marriage-project, that affair of the attempted anonymous letter in Spanish, which took place in 1662 ! Again, Vardes is made to utter this absurdity "The late Comte de

Louise also refused—and her refusal is far better authenticated than the other.¹

In the meantime Marie-Thérèse had got well. The King instantly took back his promise. There was a lively scene between him and his mistress. Louise said the plan was an outrage. Louis justified himself as best he could. "If he had let them talk of marriage, it was only because he *knew* that she would not hear of such a thing." Her final speech (according to the chronicler) is full of touching and wistful sensibility.

"I will tell you! I could die easily enough; but I cannot give you up, and I would rather lose my life than lose the lovely hopes you have given me—therefore, go on loving me. If you cease to do so, I know quite well that life will hold nothing more for me." The King fell on his knees before her. "I should be a vile wretch indeed," he cried, "if, after that, I could live for any one but you!"²

It was this moment which was chosen for the offering of some officious counsel by the Duc de Mazarin, that jealous husband of a giddy wife (December 8, 1664). He pointed out to the King that his liaison with La Vallière was shocking the whole nation, that it was high time he corrected his behaviour, and that if he (the Duke) spoke thus to his Sovereign it was because God had inspired him to do so. The King kept absolutely calm. "Have you quite finished?" . . . Then, touching his counsellor's forehead, "I always *did* think there was a wound, or

Moret, my father." He was merely the Count's widow's son—and that is a polite way of putting it. Nevertheless, the libel—distorted as the text is—gives one side of the truth.

¹ Despatch from the Ambassador Sagredo to the Doge of Venice, March 20, 1665. *Archives de la Bastille*, v. I. p. 284. This text is decisive. It proves that La Vallière refused him—and incidentally thus upholds the veracity of the *Palais-Royal* libel.

² *Le Palais-Royal: Hist: amour: des Gaules*, v. II p. 60. Do not too hastily despise our author: he wrote before 1666!

something, just there. . . ." There was no mistaking what this meant, and Mazarin retired in disorder. The Court chuckled over the delicious tale for the next month.

It would neither be right nor desirable to exculpate Louise de La Vallière from the reproach that her conduct deserves. That affront to the two Queens! . . . Yet the contemporary writers, who witnessed the affair, leave all the odium of it to the King. And it is easy to believe that in appearing at Fontainebleau, and above all at Vincennes, Louise was merely obeying the orders of her Royal lover, when we learn that at this hour of apparent triumph the poor girl was trying to conceal the fact that she was once more pregnant.

She was obliged to return to the Brion abode. By a curious coincidence, it was there (December 20), in her own room, that Louis XIV. heard of Foucquet's sentence of banishment. "If they had condemned him to death," cried the King, "he might have died, for all I should have done." Those were hard words, expressive of an excessive and unmerited resentment.

On January 7, 1665, Boucher the accoucheur once more entered by the gate opening into the Palais-Royal gardens, and at noon precisely, a little boy was born. In the evening of the same day, at nine o'clock, Colbert was waiting at the same furtive portal for the unacknowledged child.¹ The poor little thing was fetched in the arms of a *valet-de-chambre*, who was allowed to go no farther. Then Boucher and Colbert took charge of the infant, and, to cover their tracks, drove to the crossway of the Hôtel Bouillon. There the child was given over to one Bernard, the husband of a *demoiselle* du Coudray, both formerly servants to

¹ "The same precautions for secrecy as the King had desired to be taken on the former occasion" (COLBERT, *Lettres et Instructions*, v. VI. p. 464).

the Minister. The next day, by the King's command, it was baptized in the Church of Saint-Eustache, under the name of Philippe, son of François Derssy, citizen, and Marguerite Bernard, his wife. Colbert does not tell us what pretext he invented on this occasion, nor who "the *sieur* Derssy" was. The godmother was Marguerite Biet ; the godfather, Claude Tessier, 'a poor man.' And so it was a "poor man" who answered to God for the Christian teaching of a great King's son ! But God did not put him to the test. Neither Philippe nor his elder brother Charles lived long : at the end of a bare year, two small angels were praying in Heaven for a mother who had sinned through love alone.

CHAPTER II

DECEMBER, 1664—JANUARY, 1666

DESPITE the King's anxious surveillance—he never could bear to see his own methods adopted by others—Madame, the Comtesse de Soissons, Guiche, Vardes, and a few members of their set, had got, towards the end of 1664, into an amorous *imbroglio* of such a complicated description that even the consummate art of a contemporary woman-writer¹ scarcely succeeds in making it clear to us. It ended in one of those "frantic feminine scenes" where no words are spared. And, although Louise de La Vallière had nothing to do with it, it was near being the cause of her death. In connection with this affair, quite a new character now appears upon the stage. The Chevalier de Lorraine, Monsieur's favourite, Madame's foe—a sufficiently detestable attitude—the Chevalier de Lorraine had vainly wooed one of Henrietta's maids-of-honour. Vardes had had the effrontery to say that he would have done better if he had approached her mistress. The Comte de Guiche's father repeated this remark to Madame, Madame repeated it to the King, and Vardes was sent to the Bastille. He went there ostentatiously—and "everybody paid him visits."

La Vallière's ex-confidant Mlle de Montalais, still an exile in various convents, hated her seclusion worse than ever. She based her hopes of delivery from it

¹ *Hist. de Madame Henriette*, p. 132 and *sequitur*.

upon her possession of certain letters exchanged between Guiche and Madame, which she had got hold of. When she heard the latest gossip, she offered to help Vardes out of his scrape if he liked to make use of three of these letters. To his honour, the prisoner refused. But the Comtesse de Soissons, *née* Olympe Mancini, was less accessible to such exaggerated French scruples : she caught at the weapon the letters afforded her, and began to talk. She was so carried away that she actually talked of the Spanish letter, which she had written, and Guiche had merely translated. She added that Madame, "who was still English at heart," was betraying France—had she not tried to prevent her brother Charles from giving back Dunkirk ?

She was quickly paid in her own coin. One day, at a ballet "*à la tribune*," Henrietta had the Countess turned out of her seat. The King observed to his sister-in-law that she "ought to be more careful with her rival. . ." That was the end of all things ! The English-French Princess, the born Royalty, easily defeated the Italian *parvenue* Countess. Madame would perhaps have sacrificed her resentment for Guiche's sake ; but she could not endure the idea of that "Mazarin-woman" profiting by her denunciation and gaining the Royal favour once more. Henrietta was light, but she was not corrupt ; her maxim was that "when you were in a fix, it was the truth alone which could get you out of it." And often, truly, when she seemed lost in a labyrinth of intrigue, she *would* suddenly emerge triumphant from the maze, with "the truth" upon her lips !

Moreover, Louis XIV., King of France, was very careful to avoid offending the sister of the King of England, so immensely influential as she was with her brother. If he now feigned to believe in these accusations of perfidy, it was only to take advantage of her,

and thus force her to serve him better.¹ Hence his deliberate vengeance fell on all except Madame. It fell on Vardes, who was put in prison; on Guiche, who was exiled to Holland; on Madame de Soissons, who was dismissed from Court. But the Mancini had no intention of leaving the place without revenging herself, in her turn, upon the inoffensive La Vallière.

At this time, there was much talk about a woman called Catherine Monvoisin—or, more familiarly, “la Voisin.” This was a creature of about twenty-nine, rather vulgar-looking, but whose face was lit into some intelligence by a pair of small bright eyes.² She was married to a man who had been successively a jeweller and a mercer on the Pont Marie, but had had to shut up shop. Her story was that these commercial misfortunes had obliged her to “cultivate the talents that God had given her”—namely, chiromancy and an eye for physiognomy. Ever since she was nine years old, she had been telling fortunes on the bridges of Paris. To these so-called celestial gifts she now added some most infernal industries. La Bruyère speaks of a Canidia “who has wonderful secrets; she

¹ We quote an interesting despatch from the Ambassador Sagredo to the Doge: “People are whispering that the King is displeased with Madame — not for her love-affairs, for every one knows she is above reproach in such matters, but because of the hints that have been made to her about keeping Dunkirk for her brother; and the King is deeply concerned at the thought of anything which might prevent him from conquering that town.

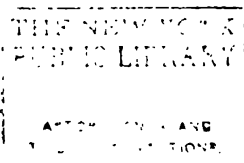
“Your Serenity will understand that one knows perhaps a little more about it all than one quite desires, and that an embarrassment which began in mere feminine intrigue may extend itself considerably, and affect grave interests of State” (Paris, April 3, 1664).

² See her portrait engraved by Antoine Coyppel. This portrait has been twice engraved. The first, about 400 millimètres high and 280 broad, exists in the first state without signature; and in the second with the signatures A. C. on the left side and on the right Exc. C. P. R. The second is 216 millimètres high and 142 broad.



After the picture by Coypel.

PORTRAIT OF LA VOISON.



promises young wives second husbands, telling them exactly the *when* and the *how*." La Voisin was certainly, if not La Bruyère's Canidia, *a* Canidia. She was by way of being a midwife; she helped babies into—and out of—the world. In 1664, persecuted, as she said, by the Missionaries (it sounds like some Megæra of the Commune), this worthy person had fled to a rather disreputable part of the town, called Villeneuve-sur-Gravois, or Villeneuve Beauregard, which had lately grown up upon the *débris* of some old fortifications around Notre-Dame de Bonne Nouvelle. Here, amid some waste sort of land, la Voisin possessed a little garden which she used as a cemetery. She had run up a rustic grotto, as was then the fashion; and at the end of the grotto she had an oven, where she would carbonise bones, distil toads, and so on.

At the door of this den of iniquity there arrived one day three fashionable ladies. One of them, drawing the sorceress aside, inveigled her out into the gruesome garden and on into the sinister "office," and then held out her hand. Directly la Voisin saw the Mount of the Sun—she probably knew a good deal about the lady beforehand—she told the visitor that "she must have been loved by some great Prince." The visitor knew this, however, quite as well as she did; so, cutting short a useless revelation of the past, she exclaimed, "Shall I again be loved by him?" "No. That will never be." "But it *must* be. . . ." And then, dropping all pretence of a consultation with the Palmist, the Comtesse de Soissons, seeing that she was recognised and having, for that matter, no desire to remain unknown, addressed herself frankly to the Poisoner. "Who was keeping the King from her?" La Vallière. . . Then she must find some means of getting rid of La Vallière. "That will be extremely difficult," replied la Voisin. Upon

which the Countess replied : "I shall find the means ; and if I cannot revenge myself upon her, I shall go further. I am utterly reckless." With that she turned to go back. "I shall get rid," she repeated, "of one or the other—no ! of both."¹ But at this moment, one of the ladies of her suite spoke to la Voisin. "Come ! tell us whether her *friend* will return to her ? Will she succeed in her plans ?" This inquisitive person was no other than Mlle du Fouilloux, who, like her mistress, pretended to be a friend of La Vallière,² while all the time she was betraying her.

"I shall find the means," Olympe Mancini had said. Well ! shortly after the visit to la Voisin's den, the Hôtel Brion was actually attacked. One night, Louise de La Vallière was just falling asleep when a sudden barking from her little dog awoke her. She heard a noise at her window, and a sound of footsteps in an apartment near her own. Instantly she fled to her maid's room. The alarm was given, and hooks and rope-ladders were found, evidently flung away by the aggressors.³

¹ *Archives de la Bastille*, v. VI. pp. 5, 103, 160. La Voisin never wavered on this point ; and this was so commented upon that Mme de Soissons, thus exposed, at last exiled herself.

² Mlle de Fouilloux (who was then *dame* d'Alluye) fled with Mme de Soissons in 1680. We can calculate by this the gravity of the charges against these ladies.

We have not been able to place the precise date of this visit within a few months. La Voisin was still on the Pont Marie in 1664. On the other hand, Mlle de Fouilloux was not married, and did not marry till January, 1667. Mme de Soissons was exiled from March, 1665, till some time in 1666. This limits the possible date of her visit to La Voisin to between October, 1664, and February, 1665. Finally, as Olympe had her fifth child on January 1, 1665, it seems probable that these proceedings took place before February, 1665. We need not stop to examine a note to the *Mémoires de Sourches*, v. I. p. 39, which seems to contradict us, for la Voisin's deposition is precise. See *Archives de la Bastille*, v. VI. p. 161.

³ *Le Palais-Royal, Hist: amour:* v. II. p. 66. This book is certainly very poor authority, and I should not have invoked it

There was no mistaking the object of the attempt ; but, despite the offer of a large reward, the authors were never discovered.¹ Certain details, reported in contemporary memoirs, prove that this was not the sole step taken. Louis not only thought it well to have the Brion Palace guarded,² but he gave La Vallière "a *maître d'hôtel* who was to taste everything she ate." Thus already we see dawning that fear of poison, which (too well-founded as it was) haunted the Court and the town for so long.

Guiche did not go into exile until May. He had just returned from a long and difficult campaign in Poland, where he had undergone many privations and trials. He was quite as much of a fop as Vardes, but he was less corrupt ; and he now prepared a sort of confession, in which, without exculpating himself or asking for pardon, he simply defended Madame. He loved her foolishly, but very sincerely, and he could not go without seeing her again ; so he managed to say his farewell to her as she passed, in her chair, through the courtyard of the Louvre. To succeed in doing this, he had been obliged to disguise himself as one of the servants of La Vallière, whom at one time he had courted, then despised, and finally attacked anonymously, unlike the fine gentleman he really was.

if I had not found in one of Sagredo's despatches the following passage: "There is much whispered talk of the audacity of some folks unknown who attempted, but vainly, to enter the King's Palace (read *Palais-Royal*), and actually to invade the favourite's apartments—according to what I hear" (March 20, 1665). *Archives de la Bastille*, v. I. p. 284 ; cf. the letter from the Duc d'Enghien, *De La Vallière à Montespan*, p. 18.

¹ Ten thousand louis, if we believe the *Vie de la Duchesse de La Vallière*, p. 207 (Cologne, 1695). The author of this had perhaps seen a more complete text of the *Palais-Royal* than we have access to.

² It is in this sense that we must interpret that passage in the *Palais-Royal* : "He gave her her own guards."

He was still wearing that grey livery when, taking his last look, he fell fainting before Madame's eyes. Great was the risk of his either being recognised or left alone in his swoon (March, 1665).¹ Where should they take one of La Vallière's servants, if not to La Vallière's house!

It was after this "big scandal," towards the early spring of 1665, that—most unfortunately for the author but very luckily for the book!—there appeared the *Histoire amoureuse des Gaules*. It was the work of an idle gentleman, who may have been a very good General (he said so, at any rate, all his life) and *was* undoubtedly a witty fellow, a little "precious" sometimes, but always mordant and amusing. The book would probably never have seen the light if the manuscript had not been hawked about at the very moment when the King was unpleasantly reminded of that wound to his vanity which the inventors of the Spanish letter had dealt. Louis, at any other time, would have tolerated a satire which, after all, scarcely affected him or his. But at this particular moment it annoyed him, and Bussy was "presented," as they said then, "with a stone *pourpoint*"—or, in the vernacular, put in the Bastille (April 16, 1665).² He left it only to be confined in his Castle

¹ *Hist. de Madame Henriette*, p. 164. This book, confirmed by Guiche's letter, and by d'Ormesson, is to be taken here as authoritative. Mme de La Fayette wrote in the actual presence of Henrietta. Properly speaking, the first part of her work ends here. The secret of the forged Spanish letter had been well kept, and few persons, even in 1665, had any precise information. Guy-Patin, usually so well-informed, speaks of it as having happened quite recently—which shows, by the way, how cautiously one must regard even the best sources of information in this kind of thing. See GUY-PATIN, letter of March 20, 1665, v. III. p. 52.

² According to Voltaire, Louis "avenged his personal injury while appearing to yield to public opinion." "The King had been offended by one of the couplets in the song of the *Hallelujah*" (*Siècle de Louis XIV.*, ch. 26). These allegations are utterly false.

at Chaseu. This excessive punishment attracted attention, piqued public curiosity—and the booksellers, no longer doubting the success of the work, had it printed by the thousand.¹ There was a sequel to the *Histoire amoureuse* in which, abandoning private persons and their adventures, the author chattered of the loves of the Gods and Goddesses, or, in simpler language, of the *Amours du Palais-Royal*. For that was the title of a little work composed undoubtedly about 1665, but not printed till 1666. The first edition having been entirely bought up—on Madame's account!—not a single copy has survived to our day; and, still more surprisingly, neither author nor publisher seems to have made any effort to reproduce the libel, which would have been sure to sell like hot cakes. Only the imprudence—or possibly the bad faith—of those entrusted with its suppression made it possible to reprint, under the titles of *Les Amours de Madame*, *L'Histoire du comte de Guiche*, *Le Palais-Royal*, those little pamphlets which, despite the most stupid alterations, do preserve, nevertheless, something of the original spirit. Louise de La Vallière, who is included with Madame, is far more leniently treated than is the Princess; and that represents, as everything else in them does, the popular opinion of the time.

For the Queen-mother as well as for the Queen, Louise was “a creature”; and Marie-Thérèse, who was not even yet a good French scholar, sometimes used a harder term. But these two had every right to be severe. Otherwise, outside the little circle of jealous

¹ Naturally the printers did not allow the booksellers to spoil *their* market! This explains the numerous contradictions and conjectures on the precise date of the first edition of Bussy's libel. Suffice it to say that at the beginning of 1665, the King knew it only in MS. (*Mémoires de Bussy*, v. II. p. 215). Bussy speaks of no printed text before 1666.

women such as the Mancini, Fouilloux, Montalais ladies, the Court was on the whole disarmed by the modesty and gentleness of Louise. In the *Amours du Palais-Royal* she is judged by her contemporaries as she will be by history. She is represented as gentle, sweet, disinterested. She loves the King for himself; she will never love any other man on earth. The chronicler indeed goes further. He knows that Louis is much besieged, that many fair ones desire him; but, in his opinion, "La Vallière is, and always will be, his *grande passion*." He forgets that *always* is a word which Love omits from its heraldic motto. . . . To sum up, this publication could not fail to displease Madame, Monsieur, and the Comtesse de Soissons; but for Louise de La Vallière it was almost a panegyric.

There is a rather interesting anecdote in the *Journal du Voyage du Cavalier Bernin*. Bellefonds showed the Cavalier's drawings to Louise de La Vallière (July 12, 1665), and told the author that "she had thought them admirable, and that to criticise that sort of thing one had to know something about it. 'She is clever enough,' replied Bernin, 'as one can see by the position she occupies.'" Chantelou, the author of this *Journal*, who was present, added, "'And especially as she has managed to keep it for four whole years.'"¹

At this very time a gentleman of Reims, working for his own edification alone, with no idea of publicity (which enhances his value for us), wrote down what he knew about the "Vallière lady," whose fame had

¹ J. LALANNE, *Journal du Voyage du cavalier Bernin*, etc., p. 50; Paris, 1888. I have done my best to make this dialogue intelligible, but the text is so confused that I give it *verbatim*. "He (Bellefonds) told the Cavalier that she thought them admirable. He said that one must know something about such things to be able to appreciate them. He (Bernin) rejoined that she was clever enough, and that it was a good proof of her cleverness to be in her position. I added, 'And to have kept it for four whole years.'"

penetrated to the provinces. It was about the period when the Comte de Soissons, Governor of Champagne, was actually in residence there, and this, being unusual, attracted the attention of Oudart Coquault, a native of Reims. The inquisitive fellow ferreted out that "Madame, the Governor's wife, one of the late Cardinal Mazarin's vipers, as the common folk in France call her," had "tried to make mischief, and had actually caused to be written to the Queen a forged letter about a love-affair of the King's, which people say was with a lady called La Vallière." "This Vallière lady is compliant and complaisant, and beautiful, and wanton. The Queen is rather dull, with little conversation; moreover, they say she doesn't speak French at all well. This gives cause for little jealousies, and also for the King's peccadilloes." Coquault was as tolerant as he was well-informed; he adds: "But the people have no business to speak ill of their King, and about such trifling matters, too." This, at any rate, was a loyal subject!

But, in truth, the future *Grand Monarque* wanted a deal of indulgence. After having duly punished the amorous and temerarious de Guiche and de Vardes, and treated Bussy-Rabutin as a common libellist, Louis, as befitted a Sovereign, did exactly what happened to suit his fancy. Mme de Monaco had recently returned to Court. It appeared that the Prince, her husband, wanted to rectify the frontier of his State. Malicious tongues were whispering that certain ladies, who were jealous of La Vallière, would not be displeased to find the Princess attempting to divert the course of the Royal affections; and Louis, who was quite determined to accord nothing to the husband, thought himself obliged to be therefore all the more charming to the wife. . . And now—enter a singular personality!

Mme de Monaco, *née* de Grammont, had a cousin called Puyguilhem, or Lauzun. He was a cadet from Gascony—small, but making the most of his inches, lively on his legs, and livelier still in his language; with a good conceit of himself, but saying even more than he thought in his own praise; very adroit with the great ones of the earth; very skilful in the invention of novel ways of flattering, which were offered with a certain flavour of enhancing arrogance. Péguilin had, as was his bounden duty, fallen in love with his fair cousin, and when she got married he followed her, disguised as a postillion. *He* saw what the Prince failed to see, and he ordered the lady to stop flirting with the King, else he would ruin her by means of some of her letters. The Princess, however, got the start of him, and denounced her denouncer—which was clever of her, undoubtedly.¹ Lauzun, summoned by the King, replied with insolent *hauteur*, was sent to the Bastille, and there behaved like the most servile of lackeys. "One may not think of resisting the King," he kept saying. "One must obey him, serve him, as a spaniel does its master." So penitent a fellow will never die in prison. Lauzun was soon out, and is henceforth to play a prominent part in the history of Louise de La Vallière. His cell was hardly vacant before Bussy-Rabutin was transferred to it; and he, in his turn, was replaced by quite another type of prisoner—M. de Sacy, convicted of Jansenism (May 26, 1666). Thus, in less than eighteen months, this cell lodged a great variety of guests: Foucquet, Lauzun, Bussy-Rabutin, Sacy.

¹ D'ORMESSON, *Journal*, v. II. p. 373. We cannot quote the anecdotes from the *Mémoires de Choisy* and the *Mémoires de Saint-Simon*. They both appear to be echoes of Lauzun's oral Memoirs. Saint-Simon undoubtedly errs in his dates. The Venetian Ambassador's Despatch to the Doge (July 18, 1665) is more trustworthy (*Archives de la Bastille*, v. II. p. 451).

Evidently it *was* stupid to "resist" the King either in finance or gallantry—or even in religious opinions.

We are not concerned with the nature of the intrigue between Louis and Mme de Monaco. We merely note this fresh symptom of inconstancy, which was scarcely noticed in the excitement of the festivities that were then (October, 1665) the sole occupation of the young King's mind.

And yet, sad things were happening in some of the Royal apartments. The Queen-mother had been attacked by a terrible and implacable and unforeseen disease. Before she fell ill she had wished that God would send her some physical suffering "so that she might offer it up." But on a hospital-visit one day, she had passed the bed of a woman dying of cancer, and, overcome by unconquerable repulsion, she had fled, exclaiming "Oh God, oh God! any scourge but that! . . ." It was that scourge which had now struck her down.

Marie-Thérèse and Mme de Motteville were by her bedside on Midsummer Eve. She was a little better, and was thinking of getting up. The two Queens were talking of the pain which the King's conduct gave them, when suddenly the younger, turning to her mother-in-law and looking at her with tender, tearful eyes, exclaimed, "I shan't mind anything if God will spare me my mother." Then, to Mme de Motteville: "*Si la pierdo, que hare?*" ("If I lose her, what shall I do?") Anne of Austria tried to console her—but who could console the dying woman herself? On Saint Anne's Day (July 26) the fever was much worse, and she suffered terribly. The King was at his darling Versailles, where he liked both to display his splendour and to show

what a great Prince can do when he stops at nothing to procure himself amusement. He often brought La Vallière there, and Madame actually joined the party at times. Anne of Austria was deeply hurt at her son's absence upon this, her *jour de fête*. She recalled the time when he would nurse her like a daughter, sitting up with her, sleeping on a mattress at the foot of her bed ; and when, next day, he came to visit her, she could not help reproaching him, and dwelling upon the scandal he would give rise to if he seemed so bent upon amusing himself while she was dying. Louis felt that she was right ; he saw that in his love of pleasure he was going too far ; he said he would follow her advice. And in fact, though he was obliged to return that day to Versailles to receive Henrietta of France, Queen-Dowager of England, he came back almost immediately. For once he deserted all those lady-friends, "who were fitted only for amusement," and who indeed were but little grieved by the sufferings of their idolised Prince's mother at Saint-Germain. More than once, in after-years, the remembrance of the dissipation and heartlessness at Versailles—which had so nearly infected even the son's heart—troubled the awakened conscience of Louise de La Vallière.

The year 1665 ended in cruel suffering for Anne of Austria, which she bore with beautiful resignation. The New Year began with no less atrocious agony—but all was soon to be over. No one had dreamed that the end was so near ; it had seemed, indeed, that she would linger long. And so the impression of her reproaches had quickly faded from the King's mind, and the festivities had begun again. In the beginning of October (1665), an impromptu ballet was danced, with words by Dangeau and music by Frementeau. The cast was curious : the Governor

of the Province was played by the King, the Governor's wife by Madame, his brother by the Marquis de Villeroy, his sister by Mlle de La Vallière. Louis had never been more devoted to his mistress, and the proofs of his passion were soon evident. On January 5, 1666, Monsieur and Madame entertained the King. "There had not been such a feast for ages." There was a concert in the Great Gallery of the Palais-Royal, a play in the Little Gallery, a supper, a ball. On the 6th, they "had to have time to breathe." On the 9th, there took place a ceremony particularly affronting to the Queen-mother and her mourning daughter-in-law. Thanks to a considerable fortune and great favours, Louis had succeeded in getting the Comte du Roure to marry Mlle d'Artigny, that disreputable girl whose one desert was that she had served as confidante to La Vallière and spy to the King. She had been poor and despised ; now she was rich and envied. It was in Madame's apartment at the Palais-Royal that the betrothal was celebrated by Daniel de Cosnac, Bishop of Valence. The King was present, as he was also at the play, ball, and ballet which followed. On the 10th, the gaiety began again at the Duc de Créqui's.

Let us hear Robinet, Loret's successor, the doggerel rhymester of fashion :

"Enfin, par un aimable Bal
On finit la Réjouissance ;
Mais après, pour une autre Dance,
On couche dans un Lit pompeux
Ce beau Couple, selon ses Voeux.
Car peu luy plaisoit la remise ;
Et le Roy donna la Chemise,
Avecque Monsieur, à l'Époux,
Par un honneur certes bien doux,
Comme pareillement Madame,
Avec une autre aimable Dame,
A l'Épouse aussi la donna ;
Et puis on les abandonna
Tant à l'Amour qu'à ses Complices."

The author gives in the margin the "other lady's" name : 'twas the Marquise de Montespan. Well! on the very night of these somewhat disreputable marriage-festivities, Marie-Thérèse, alone with Anne of Austria, was complaining of the state of affairs. These gaieties annoyed her more than any of the others had done, for she could not help seeing in them a proof of Louise's influence. Since her favour extended to d'Artigny, it must be far-reaching indeed. And the dying woman could not but agree, though, with her usual gentleness, she said that the follies of youth must be judged leniently—and then, to change the subject : "We shall have our turn!" she whispered brightly. "We shall be dancing in the spring!" Less than ten days afterwards she was in the final agonies : death had claimed at last her worn and emaciated body. The people grieved profoundly and sincerely. She had once been disliked and insulted, her name had been mingled with Mazarin's in the popular execrations ; but by her native charm and her maternal devotion, by her French sympathies and French ways of seeing things, she had disarmed prejudice and regained a wide popularity. It was only her intimates who had a word to say against her now. Her nearest relations were, if not exactly indifferent, at any rate disappointing. Monsieur shed many tears ; but his sorrows never troubled him long.¹ Henrietta was very moderate in her grief, like many another daughter-in-law ; but the real surprise was that Marie-Thérèse was only too like Madame.² Tender and loving as

¹ Mme DE MOTTEVILLE, v. IV. p. 434. See Madame de La Fayette's reference to the death of Monsieur's daughter : "Monsieur was as much grieved as he is capable of being. He was utterly overcome at first, but in four or five days he was quite himself again." *Mémoires de la cour de France*, p. 143.

² "She who had really held a daughter's place in the Queen-mother's heart . . . was a little too much in sympathy with the other daughter-in-law" (Mme DE MOTTEVILLE, v. IV. p. 439).

she was, and devoted as she had been during the long illness, Marie-Thérèse was now beguiled by "a malicious flatterer." It had been the King's desire that the Queen-mother should have precedence over her daughter-in-law, and this unknown toady pointed out to the consort that in future "*she* would be the great lady." Even the King, grieved as he was, betrayed a certain satisfaction at being freed from all control.

Passion detests constraint, which in reality preserves it, and longs for liberty—which kills it. Louis, though he had insulted his mother by bringing his mistress into her apartments, still imagined that he had preserved a perfect decorum. The day after Anne of Austria's death he said "that at least he had the comfort of thinking that he had never disobeyed her in anything of importance." From that day, at all events, "he put no further restraint on himself, as any fool could perceive"; and that not in affairs of State, which the Queen-mother had long abandoned to him, but at Court, "which began to be a very different place indeed." The coffin was still at the Louvre, but this astonishing Court had fled to Saint-Germain, and on Wednesday, January 27, the Parliament, the Audit-chamber (*Chambre des comptes*) the Court of Subsidies, (*Cour des aides*) all arrived "to condole with the King upon the Queen-mother's death." At the Mass after the reception, the astounded magistrates beheld Mlle de La Vallière side by side with Marie-Thérèse. The Queen, 'twas said, had permitted this "out of complaisance for the King, in which she shows great wisdom." And neither the ladies nor the courtiers are responsible for this easy Maxim for Queens—the author of it is a solemn magistrate, Lefèvre d'Ormesson. Not that, like so many of his *confrères*, he was indulgent towards these fair misdemeanants. "Despite her lovely

eyes and complexion," he says, "I do not admire this lady. . . She is very thin, her cheeks are lined (*consues*), her mouth and teeth are ugly, her nose is thick, and her face too long." Evidently he regarded her with the eyes of an offended moralist; but, apart from the temporary languor already alluded to, there is no doubt that Louise's beauty was beginning to lose its first freshness. Mystery, isolation, were her elements. Sweet, graceful, tender, rather than beautiful or brilliant, she withered in the glare of publicity. Already people were expressing surprise at her "ordinary appearance"; soon the wits and the *précieuses* would hint that she was "rather stupid." Once let the King's passion show the slightest sign of cooling, and harder sayings would be on every one's lips. The affair had caused much jealousy: its end would be proportionately welcome.

Louise's brother was the first to feel the change—not that we need attach too much importance to various little favours he had enjoyed, such as the transfer to him of confiscated property, and so on. Indefensible as this kind of thing is, it belonged to the customs of the time. Lamoignon, for instance, had been granted the estates of a political victim. Jean-François was probably a mere vehicle for liberalities not openly to be shown to Louise de La Vallière. But the young Marquis was not so excusable when, less than two years after his marriage, he made an exhibition of himself by a duel with the Chevalier de Lorraine about a niece of M. de Fiennes, with whom both gentlemen declared themselves in love. The King conveyed to the Marquis his desire that this latter "should cause no further troubles of the kind about that girl." Monsieur, who had patched matters up, was nevertheless somewhat snubbing to the favourite's brother when that young man, uninvited, joined the

party at Saint-Cloud. Monsieur was given to little tempers, but Jean-François very probably did overdo the tone of familiarity, for about this time he thought well to write the King a letter of condolence on the death of Anne of Austria. Can he possibly have adopted a quasi-fraternal tone? or was Louis already turning against him? Be that as it may, the Marquis got a very distinct rebuff: "Monsieur le Marquis de La Vallière, what I have suffered in losing the Queen my mother, surpasses every effort of your imagination, and, to answer you in one word, pray realise that only the hand which has dealt the blow can possibly alleviate the pain it has given me."¹

There is no mistaking it—from the very beginning of 1666, the charm was evidently broken. That "eternal love," still flatteringly alluded to both in prose and verse, had ceased to be reciprocal. Was it Louise's pallor and emaciation which made her lover fickle? If he noticed them, it was a sign that his love was dead.

They were not of sudden growth, either. The year before, Louis had found his mistress lost in thought. On asking her why: "Don't think," she said, "that my glass doesn't show me how I've altered. I'm not pretty now. I have lost all my looks, and I am afraid that, that being so, you will want fresher beauties to admire. But be very sure that you will not find elsewhere all that I give you." The King looked at her tenderly. "He knows she loves him truly—just as he wants to be loved. It is her heart he prizes, not the freshness of her complexion, nor the brightness of her eyes; no! it is those moral beauties which she will retain as long as she lives." And Louise cries, "How good you are to me, dear Prince! how kind

¹ *Œuvres de Louis XIV.*, v. V. p. 361. The letter is dated Feb. 11, 1666. See D'ORMESSON, *Journal*, v. II. p. 412, where the King announces that he does not wish to receive condolences from private persons: only official ones are to be sent him.

to reassure a heart which fears but because it loves too well! Yes," she goes on, embracing him, "you are right in believing that it is not your greatness which dazzles me—that I never remembered your crown when I fell in love with you." . . . And so the conversation went on, most tenderly—and yet she was sad when it was over. If the King's love does begin to fail her, she knows quite well what she will do; she will be the first to retreat.¹ Less than a year after this interview the King's love *did* begin to fail. Louise did not perceive it at first; and when she did—when, abandoned, betrayed, and no longer able to conceal it from herself—she wished indeed to retreat, she had to learn, through five years of torture, that it is not so easy to return to the straight path as to leave it.

¹ *Le Palais-Royal: Hist: amour: des Gaules*, v. II. p. 87. Some passages of this work were written before 1666; probably in 1665.

CHAPTER III

JANUARY, 1666—NOVEMBER, 1666

ON the death of Anne of Austria, all fêtes and masquerades were suspended; but, while omitting the town Carnival, the Court thought it necessary, on March 13, to divert its grief by a trip to Mouchy,¹ where the King was to review fifteen thousand troops. "Many ladies came. Although they were in mourning (*justaucorps de deuil*), they amused themselves very successfully. The King was in great spirits, and sang songs along the road on the way back." La Vallière still rode beside the King, but the songs were no longer all for her.

Lent was already far advanced. The Court-preacher, Bossuet, had on Lady Day preached a first solemn sermon to the memory of Anne of Austria. The Archdeacon of Metz, whom already rumour proclaimed Bishop,² was faithful to her suggestions and to those of his own all-sufficing conscience, and was not sparing of advice to the young King, now freed from his last restraint. Louis listened only at very irregular intervals. The orator inveighed against the endless

¹ Mlle DE MONTPENSIER, *Mémoires*, v. IV. p. 30; *Gazette de France*, 1666, p. 515. The Court left on March 13, and returned on March 18. Note here a mistake of Mlle de Montpensier's, who says, "They went to Mouchy *in Lent*." The editor, M. CHÉRUEL, quoting Olivier d'Ormesson, mentions March 14. See *Journal*, v. II. p. 451, edited by Chéruel.

² "Abbé, digne d'être prélat" (*Continuateurs de la Muse historique de Loret*, number for May 2, 1666, v. I. p. 836).

pleasure-seeking of the Court, for ever on the road from Saint-Germain to Versailles and from Versailles to Saint-Germain. Between April 6 and 15, they commenced those parties at Versailles "where they only had a few people," and which were very delightful. Here is an account of them from the *Gazette rimée* :

" Dans ces lieux délicieux
Notre Cour s'ébaudit des mieux.
La ramasse, l'escarpolette,
Le volant avec la raquette
Et d'autres petits jeux nouveaux,
La chasse, le vol des oyzeaux
Et le plus souvent des cœurs mêmes
Sont là les délices suprêmes
Que l'on goûte à ce renouveau,
Où l'amour, mille fois plus beau,
Se fait de toutes les parties,
Qui sans lui sont mal assorties. "

But Cupid, as usual, was giving more pain than pleasure. For instance, it was during one of these "little games" that Lauzun (Puy-Guilhem) was extraordinarily brutal to his dearly-loved cousin, Mme de Monaco. He knew, without a shadow of doubt, that she had at least compromised herself with Louis XIV. The King's person being sacred, he revenged himself on the unfaithful lady by crushing her hand under his heel. She was more frightened than hurt ; but when she discovered that it was Lauzun who had done it, she complained bitterly. Lauzun swore that it had been a complete accident, and offered to throw himself out of the window ; but he did not do so. The poor husband, M. de Monaco, declared he would be revenged for this injury, and went off to Holland to consult with his brother-in-law, Guiche. The King, utterly bored by the whole affair, took the trouble to draw up a sort of official report of the episode, and sent it to d'Estrades at the Hague, with orders to keep Guiche and Monaco under supervision,

"You must know," he wrote, "that on Monday last at Versailles, every one was in the drawing-room gambling for a jewel worth twelve hundred pistoles. The ladies were all sitting on the polished floor, as they thought it would be cooler. I was standing watching the game, with much interest to see who would win. Stepping back a little to see better, every one between me and the wall was obliged to change his place, and, amongst others, Puy-Guilhem. He moved quickly to make room for me, and unfortunately, quite by accident, trod upon Mme de Monaco's hand, which she had leant on the ground to support herself, but which was covered by her skirt in such a manner that nobody could see it—a circumstance of much importance, considering all you will hear."

The Comte de Guiche was trying then to make a name for himself. Brave as we know he was, he had served with the French troops against the Bishop of Munster. In the winter, he had tried diplomacy, with a certain amount of success. Just now he was giving rein to all kinds of whims. For instance, he appeared one day on the Voorhout, dressed in the most extraordinary fashion, partly Grecian, partly Roman, but complicated by scraps from every nation, Italian, Spanish, Hungarian, all of the most eccentric kind. Vieing with him in oddity was another hare-brained creature, the Marquis de La Vallière, who had also distinguished himself on the battle-field. But *he* was not clever enough, 'twas said, to lay aside his French manners. These two great babies had not finished their masquerade when the Comte de Louvigny appeared, clothed quite simply as a lord of the French Court—and carried all before him. . . Guiche and La Vallière seem to have been great friends. The good Dutch people, who knew all the Court gossip from libellists, could hardly believe their eyes; and it still more astonished them to see how gaily

these young scatterbrains would throw off their disguises and buckle on their armour. . . The journey, the climate, and the advice of d'Estrades, having calmed down Monaco's anger, he induced his brother-in-law to embark with him in the Dutch fleet. Their vessel, which went almost immediately into action, was boarded and sunk by the English, and they very narrowly escaped death.

Jean-François had served on land under the orders of Pradel, and had just been nominated Captain-Lieutenant, and put in command of the Dauphin's Light Horse. His company had to be largely renewed, the majority of the officers who had composed it having gone to swell the lists of a new corps. However, filled up by the best men from four other companies, it cut quite a dash, and at the attack on the cemetery of Oudenborch, near Bois-le-duc, the Marquis took the position, disposed of six hundred of his enemies, captured a flag, and took prisoner Colonel Carp, Commandant of the Dutch Army.

The humours of Louvois, who began his career as Minister of War, confirm rather than weaken the impression of young La Vallière's merit. They were old friends and merry companions.

It is easy to be a good soldier and a good administrator, as these young men were, without being exactly typical of all other virtues as well. On the day when the Peace of Munster was proclaimed, the Minister described the uneasiness among the Parisian ladies at the news of the Marquis's approaching return. "They fear that the laurels you have gained in foreign countries may make you arrogant in your native land, and that your tongue may be more dangerous than your pen. I have assured them that the heroes of old times always showed even more gentleness to ladies than brutality to enemies, and that you will

follow in their footsteps ; that you are, besides, an honourable gentleman, and that I will stand your security for all this."

This tone, rare enough then between a Minister and a young officer, is explained by the intimate friendship of which we spoke above ; and perhaps we may see, as well, the effect of the rumours which were then running through the Court.

From March, 1666, the King's coldness towards his mistress became noticeable. On the following April 23, the Prince de Condé wrote to the Queen of Poland : "They think His Majesty is soon going to make Mlle de La Vallière a Duchess ; she deserves it. No one can be more loved than she is at the Court, for she does no harm, and tries to do all the good she can."

While all these incidents, and parties "paired off by love" were taking place, the experienced eye of a woman discovered signs of weariness in the King, which indicated that the hour had struck for new emotions. This, at least, was what Mme de Choisy imagined—the same person who had suggested "*la petite La Vallière*" to Madame Henriette. Perhaps her *protégée* had not been sufficiently grateful (that is the cardinal sin !), for she had asked no more for others than for herself. Whatever may have been the reason, the lady now produced an heiress from Poussé, beautiful enough, but rather silly, with affected provincial manners. In this matter the clever go-between made a mistake. No two passions are alike. Louis was no longer at that tender age when a man is "bowled over" by the first woman he sees ; nevertheless, the ex-patroness of little La Vallière was not entirely wrong—*she* had failed, but others were going to succeed.

Just then a woman appeared, who, with every intention of fighting against Louise, went to live in

the same house with her. This latter, though she was living at the Castle, possessed a little house at Versailles in the Rue de Pompe, which still exists. It was not of so much importance as the Brion, but more elegant; and, though originally erected to Love, it was to be the scene of strange events. At the Revolution it served as a Court of Justice, then as a prison, and in 1792 a bloodthirsty populace slaughtered a large number of Royalists there.

At the time of this history, life in the Rue de Pompe was very gay, or apparently so. It was a sort of refuge from the common herd. A great deal of society gathered therein, including all the ladies of rank, who had formerly been disdainful, but were now very eager—some quite too much so. Much noticed was Mme de Montespan, “such a clever woman, so witty, so full of delightful conversation!” La Vallière, they said, had little of all that, and “cleverness was *so* necessary to keep the King amused.”

Françoise de Montespan belonged to a noble family, and compared to her, a La Vallière was quite a commoner. From the old family-tree of Rochechouart a branch called Mortemart had sprung—recent, but full of strength and vitality. The head of this line, who had the honour of being the auxiliary of Richelieu against Cinquars, was father to a boy, Vivonne (the friend and favourite of Louis XIV.’s boyish days) and of three beautiful, witty daughters, one of them strictly virtuous, the other virtuous and coquettish, the third haughty and ambitious. Arriving at Court in 1661, just twenty years old, this last maiden called herself Athénais de Tonnay-Charente. The ladies who had flourished in the days of Anne of Austria’s Regency had always understood that beauties ought

to be charming and graceful, and they considered Athénaïs chilling and aggressive. She succeeded in pleasing some only by wounding others—mockers and victims equally being of small account to her.

When this beauty appeared, the King was in love with La Vallière and was proof against the most vigorous onsets, while Monsieur had the kind of heart that no woman can set alight ! So there was no room for her, and, finding none else worthy of surrender, the Tonnay-Charente resolved to marry, and out of pique became the wife of Montespan. The bride was twenty-one, and the bridegroom twenty—the initial mistake in this headlong marriage !

Montespan was a clever and brilliant man, and possessed in the Pyrenees, at Bellegarde, one of those perched sort of castles surrounded by a great tract of bare rocks. To hear the marriage-contract read, one might have imagined that the young pair were going to be wise enough to renounce Court-life and seek their happiness in the simpler joys of rusticity. M. de Mortemart apparently gave one hundred and fifty thousand *livres* as dowry to his daughter, but in reality only gave sixty thousand, arranging to pay the rest as an annual allowance, which, as is usual in such cases, he never did. The painfully doled-out sixty-thousand was at once greedily borrowed by Montespan's father and mother—they were supposed to pay interest, of course ; but the interest, like the allowance, was seldom forthcoming.

The young people were quickly over head and ears in debt, and went from bad to worse, only to find themselves at last weighed down by that misery and dishonour which so entirely prove the truth of the proverb : " When poverty comes in at the door, love flies out of the window." They borrowed on all sides, and the exquisite Mortemart lady had to sign those

promissory notes which are among the hideous necessities of such a poverty-stricken existence.

She knew herself to be prettier than any one else, and felt herself to be clever enough to deceive husband, Queen, favourite—even the King himself ; and yet she was condemned to vegetate. What anguish it was ! In 1666, Mme de Montespan used to run over to La Vallière's house in the afternoons, and talk most delightfully to her, while in the evenings, she would go to the Queen and do the same thing. The most objectionable part of it was that she covered her utter cynicism with a cloak of virtue, and communicated frequently. Dominated by her ambition, untouched by religion, this young woman was boldly forcing her way upwards, almost to the throne itself—and thus we find her in 1666, when the Court left for Fontainebleau.

Places do not change, but men do. The King's notice, so sought after, turned at last towards this beauty, who was indeed brilliantly lovely. All the young men, as usual (amongst them, the Duc de Longueville, aged seventeen), were doing their best to make the rising star as remarkable as possible. The new goddess, "by way of showing the Queen how good she was, and intimating to the King that her thoughts were only for him, made fun of her lovers (or 'adorers' as they would be called nowadays) and, sitting by the Queen's bedside, repeated what each of them had said to her." The King was interested in these confidences, and one of Mme de Montespan's young admirers, thinking that Royalty had some intentions, retired in good order—the phrase is his own. Soon all the others imitated him. It was just what Brienne and Guiche had done in the same Palace, in 1661.

Mme de Montespan was then in full beauty. Two years older than Louise de La Vallière, she looked four years younger. Though she was the mother of

two boys, one would never have guessed her to be a married woman, for she seemed like a young girl—one of that curious type which it is so hard to describe, for one cannot be sure if “naïve” or “provocative” is the right word. With a superb air of self-confident virtue, she displayed the most brilliant attractions of mind and body, yet she did not trust in these alone;¹ for while every one recognised in her the coming favourite, *she* was, all the while, consulting magicians and sorceresses.

Like Mme de Soissons, she went to la Voisin, and begged for the help of her witchcraft against La Vallière. The palmist was not surprised. For some time, people “from all parts” had been soliciting her assistance against the same lady. Powerful people of high rank “were compounding with the devil by compacts sealed with their own blood, to dethrone Mlle de La Vallière from her exalted position, and to take her place with the King.” These are the exact words of one of this villainous woman’s companions.

All that follows is taken from a long and minute judicial examination, which was conducted by an honourable and clear-sighted man. Later on, Royal authority wished to wipe out all trace of these horrible superstitions; but the truth is clear enough, and has come down to the present day. It has been proved that many ladies inquired of Voisin how to please the King. The sinister garden of Villeneuve-sur-Gravois was visited by Mme de La Motte, who wished to be loved by Louis and, as a side-issue, to get rid of her lover, D’Albret. (The poor man was destined anyhow to an unfortunate end, for he was killed by M. de La Motte’s servants in the Castle of Pinon, in Picardy.) Thither came also Mme de Grammont (*née* Hamilton), and Mme de Polignac,

¹ See the beautiful portrait engraved by Picard.

(née du Roure), the latter hardly twenty-five years old, and bent upon the downfall of La Vallière. She gave four pistoles—about two hundred francs in modern money—for the consultation. M. de Polignac, it appears, knew of the “intention of Madame his wife to establish relations with the King.” What he did not know was her further wish to get rid of him, and that “for this relief” she would have paid more than four pistoles. This young person did not, however, intend to find herself destitute all at once, for she begged of the sorceress the continuation of the friendship (*l'amitié*) of M. le Comte du Lude, of M. le Vicomte de l'Arboust, and of M. d'Oradour !

There appeared yet another suppliant who wished to be admired by the King, and who, to make room for herself, suggested poisoning La Vallière. But it would be necessary to be a Voisin not to feel horrified at such a request from such a source, for this last client was the d'Artigny, then Comtesse du Roure, worthy sister-in-law of Mme de Polignac. The abominable creature longed to bite with poisoned teeth the hand which had helped her. To this rich clientèle add Mme de Montespan, and it is easy to see that though Voisin's husband had lost his work, *she* was in a fair way to get plenty of custom.

She was well-satisfied ; and yet she had to submit to competition which she called treacherous. She had been too confidential with her brothers-in-art, and they were stealing away her custom. In spite of the wonderful knowledge “which God had given her,” our conscientious artist thought it well sometimes to invite the help of other learned folk. There were three in particular : the first, a Parisian of the Parish of Saint-Eustache, named Etienne Guibourg, was then about fifty-six ; he described himself as the natural son of that M. de Montmorency who had been executed at

Toulouse. First a priest at Paris, then at Saint-Spire de Corbeil, then Almoner to the Comte de Montgommery in the Castle of Villebousin, we find him now at Versailles, where he officiated in the Chapel of Buisson and at Saint-Denis, as a priest belonging to the Church of Saint-Marcel. The outspoken *curé* of Saint-Denis strongly recommended him not to associate with certain persons suspected of magic—but to no purpose. Sorcerer and artistic poisoner as he was, clever at all kinds of witchcraft, having known La Boissière, one of Sainte-Croix pupils, and even Sainte-Croix himself (the operator of La Brinvilliers)—Guibourg, friend and accomplice of la Voisin and la Filastre, had fallen twenty years before under the spell of another female poisoner, and had had several children by her, nearly all of whom he had made away with. His appearance was worthy of his trade. He had a very ruddy complexion, and the most appalling squint. He was called the Prior, either because he had obtained the Priory of Bois-Courtiz, near Mont Saint-Michel, or, more probably, because any one, with the offer of a bribe, could start him off at once upon the most execrable prayers.

A little younger than Guibourg, and of very good family on his mother's side, was the second of la Voisin's collaborators, François Mariette, priest of Saint-Séverin. He also had a mistress, la Leroux, a professional poisoner. His sister, named Chapelle, was not much better than he was. Mariette undertook to dispose of all inconvenient children. His family lived in the suburbs of Montlhéry—a rather important detail in this history.

The trio was completed by one Lesage, called du Buisson, though his real name was Cœuret, a man of about thirty-eight, belonging to Venoix, near Caen.¹

¹ M. Ravaissou says first: born at Vernon, Normandy (*Archives*

Ostensibly a wool-merchant, in reality he sold mole-powders and all sorts of extraordinary things. Though he had left a wife in Normandy, he tried to enter the family of la Desmarets, a person of the same kind as la Voisin. Refused, after inquiries had been made by a prudent mother, his thoughts turned towards la Voisin herself, a wanton of thirty, married, it is true, but who might become a widow. Very cunningly, this low Norman pretended to know nothing about *making* powders—only where they could be bought. He was no artist, no wizard of even white magic; merely a scoundrel of the lowest type.¹

From la Voisin's hands Mme de Montespan quickly passed to those of her accomplices. From chiromancy she fled to magic, and from magic to sorcery. La Voisin looked a little at the hand and much into the eyes, quickly caught up the slightest hint, and then gave love-powders. These powders were passed under the chalice by the priest Mariette, and the magician Lesage uttered most magic words over them. That was very impressive, but it was nothing compared to a certain Mass which only Guibourg could say.

Now, amongst Mme de Montespan's ladies-in-waiting was a young lady named Desœillet, intimately connected with one Le Roy, Governor of the Pages of the *Petite Ecurie*. Le Roy possessed a house in

de la Bastille, v. IV. p. 11); but later, says at Genons, near Caen (v. V. p. 285). We ought to read: Venoix Parish, in the District of Caen. The name Cœuret is still common in the country. I have tried to find the baptismal certificate of Cœuret, but unfortunately the Parish registers of Venoix do not go beyond the eighteenth century. I owe this information to the kindness of my excellent master, M. Charles Marie, Senior Professor of Caen College.

¹ That Voltaire, in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV.*, should have called Lesage *Abbé* is a very pardonable mistake. It is less easy to explain how M. Clément, who had in his own hands all the documents of the proceedings, speaks of the Abbé Lesage, Almoner of the House of Montmorency. See *Police sous Louis XIV.*, p. 180. He has confused Lesage with Guibourg, and Montgomery with Montmorency.

the hamlet of Mesnil, quite close to the Castle of Villebousin,¹ where Guibourg had lived as Almoner to Montgomery. Le Mesnil and Villebousin bordered upon Villiers, which was lorded over by M. d'Aubray, (father of the Marquise de Brinvilliers), who died of poison this very year. The Marquise went from time to time to Villiers, where she employed a clever gardener to look after her plants. Exili and Sainte-Croix had been there.²

The Castle, a fourteenth-century building, was very well chosen for these dark incantations. Situated about half a mile from Paris on the road to Orleans, it was easy to get at. Surrounded by deep moats filled with running water, it was easy to hide in also. So Villebousin was selected as the scene of a diabolical ceremony which was finally to tear Louise de La Vallière from the heart of a king already unfaithful enough. Le Roy, strange Governor of Pages! was sent to Saint-Denis to make terms with Guibourg, whom he had been soliciting for more than a year. He promised him fifty *pistoles*, and a premium of 2,000 *livres*. The despicable creature would have done his part for ten *écus*. On the day fixed, he was

¹ Villebousin, a hamlet in the parish of Longpont, District of Longjumeau (Seine-et-Oise). The Castle belonged to the Comte de Montgomery. LEBEUF, *Histoire du diocèse de Paris*, v. X. p. 139. *Notice sur la paroisse de Longpont*.—PINARD, *Histoire archéologique du canton de Longjumeau*, p. 199. It refers to François de Montgomery, great-grandson of Gabriel de Montgomery, beheaded in 1574. He married Marie-Louise of Brisson, a lady of Villebousin, whose ancestors possessed this domain for a long time.

² Dreux d'Aubray and Antoine d'Aubray had taken the title of Lords of Villiers. L'Abbé Lebeuf writes that Villiers belonged to the Marquise de Brinvilliers. "They even say that it was there she made up her poisons." *Histoire du diocèse de Paris*, v. X. p. 139. L'Abbé Lebeuf was well informed. See Mme de Briancourt's deposition at the trial of La Brinvilliers. "The lady told her that she had a country house named Villiers, where she often went, and that La Chaussée was a clever business-man, who might become her gardener at Villiers" (*Archives de la Bastille*, v. IV. p. 201).

to go to Villebousin from his side ; Mme de Montespan and "a tall creature" were to go from theirs, accompanied by Le Roy and another person whose name was not mentioned, but who was to pass as one of the gentlemen of the Archbishop of Sens.

There was a chapel in the Castle, well known to Guibourg. On a day arranged by them, a young woman was laid upon the altar. According to the sacrilegious rite, she ought to have been entirely naked ; but, in a last spasm of decency, she uncovered only certain parts of her body. A turned-down hood hid her face and breasts. When the altar was thus prepared, and the candles lighted, Guibourg entered. He put a white napkin upon the naked body, and placed the chalice thereon. The Mass began, and was carried out in all its ceremonies, even to the kiss given usually by the celebrant to the altar-steps, but pressed this time upon the woman's shuddering flesh by the loathsome Guibourg. At the consecration, obscenity was replaced by horror. Usually, they were content to offer some abortion as a sacrifice ; but this time they did everything in the grand style, and it was a little living child that the "tall creature," the Marquise's assistant, offered to the sorcerer. He had bought the little one for an *écu*, saying to the mother—reduced to such necessity!—that it was to be taken to another woman who was in need of an infant at the breast. The officiating priest then delivered this incantation : "Astaroth and Asmodeus, Princes of friendship and love, I conjure you to accept this child in sacrifice for those things I would ask of you. I conjure you, O Spirits ! whose names are in these written papers, to attend to the wishes and plans of the person for whom this Mass is celebrated." Then the woman lying upon the altar stated her desire : "I ask for the love of the King, and that I may obtain

from him all that I want for myself and my relations, that all my dependants may be pleasing to him, that he may forsake La Vallière and never see her again."¹

The incantation over, Guibourg cut the child's throat with a penknife, and poured the blood into the chalice. The innocent victim was carried away, but soon his heart and entrails were brought back to be offered as a second oblation, and then to be calcined and reduced to powder for the use of Louis de Bourbon.² That Mortemart's daughter, witty and intellectual as she was, believed in the occult powers of these scoundrels, is beyond question.³ But how could she, so arrogant in her haughty beauty, display herself before these blackguards! Yet all records say so, and we can only hope that some member of the cabal acted as substitute in the name of the Marquise.

All this happened in the year 1666,⁴ at the time when, in the daytime, Mme de Montespan amused the

¹ La Reynie seems to have been deeply struck by Guibourg's account. His whole text was apparently written and added to many times. In 1666, Mme de Montespan asked for nothing but La Vallière's downfall (*Archives de la Bastille*).

² Guibourg confessed to the sacrifice of five children (*Archives de la Bastille*, v. VI. p. 433).

³ These accounts were given from memory by several of the accused, who were confused as regards dates, for the Montespan had had recourse to these abominable practices for ten years. La Reynie saw clearly that these rogues, both male and female, could not, as isolated persons, have reproduced these invocations unless they had heard them many times repeated. LEMOINE AND LICHTENBERGER, *De La Vallière à Montespan*, p. 185, look upon the incantation as ridiculous in its phraseology, but we need only refer to books of magic. It is the true style of the trade and its *clientèle*.

⁴ La Reynie, summing up all the informations, says: "As to the three Masses with sacrifices, the date is not fixed. Guibourg does not know it, but, so far as one can gather from the circumstances, the date of these first Masses was probably, for the solicitation, 1665; and for the execution at Measil, 1666" (*Archives de la Bastille*, v. VI. p. 434). La Reynie adds: "Remarkable details were, the long solicitations of Le Roy, Governor of the Pages of the *Petite Écurie*, and of the Gentleman of the Archbishop of Sens, by Mme de Montespan." Finally, he sums up and finds Mme de Montespan guilty, p. 436.

King at La Vallière's house, while in the evenings she went to tell the Queen that she had spent the morning at Holy Mass.

Returning to the month of May, 1666, we find the incantations still going on. The charms worked successfully ; the Montespan could not doubt that. There was nothing but praise of Athénaïs. Without her help, every one declared that La Vallière was incapable of "amusing the King." It was getting serious. La Grande Mademoiselle, always on the look-out for a chance of being disagreeable, added : "If La Vallière had had any sense, she would have made friends with some lady whose beauty and personal charms were not equal to her intellect."

What a mistake ! and indeed it was not until long afterwards that Mademoiselle understood the situation. Louise had not the subtlety of a Mortemart. Devoid of all worldly ambition, she continued to love without a thought of mistrust. She was assuredly the last to hear (if she ever did at that time), the reports which rumour was circulating broadcast, that her marriage was to be arranged, that she was to be made Duchesse d'Aumale, and that the cleverer people saw in this "signs of withdrawal and change." This plan was not carried out, either because of some return of tenderness, or because of a circumstance which rendered such a course useless or premature. One of the two children whom Louis had had by La Vallière was dead, but the other was alive, and this strong living bond (now that all ties of love were losing their influence over him), held imperious obligations for the King. Besides, he loved the little boy, who, it seems, was very like him ; he often went to see him at the Tuileries, where he was being brought up. Towards the end of July the child died, quite suddenly.¹

¹ See D'ORMESSON, *Journal*, v. II. p. 463 (July 29). Mademoiselle

Colbert hastened to Fontainebleau to make all necessary arrangements; for the poor mother, who never had the joy of rocking her babies in the cradle, was not even allowed the consolation of being by their death-beds. On the contrary, the festivities went on as usual, and she was obliged to go to them. The Court had accepted the favourite, and were determined to make her pay for it.

Of maternity Louise knew nothing except the moral and physical suffering. At her son's death, she had to hide her tears, as well as the fact that she was again pregnant, which might have been a consolation for any other mother, but which caused her only one more torment.

Indeed, three months had scarcely gone by after this sorrow, before Louise, who was with the Court at the Castle of Vincennes,¹ was seized by the pangs of childbirth. These Palaces had been built only with a view to public life and gaiety; even the rooms were fitted up like reception-rooms, in which it would be utterly out of place to be ill or sad. That occupied by the unfortunate mistress of the King was actually public: it served as a passage to the State-apartments!

It was here she had to lie up, send for the doctor, and restrain her moanings so that her shame might not be discovered. Suddenly the door opened; some one came in. La Vallière recognised her former mistress and rival, Madame Henriette—Madame, who may

(*Mémoires*, v. IV.) says that the child died of fright from a thunder-clap. She makes the silly remark that such nervousness was not worthy of a King's son. Ormesson says that Mlle de La Vallière had already lost a boy *and a girl*. Colbert and Mlle de Montpensier always speak of two boys. The *daughter* then must have been born towards the end of 1665, and at that time Louise was still appearing at Court. It is a libel, composed before 1666, that speaks of a daughter of La Vallière.

¹ The Court had just settled down at Vincennes on August 19, 1666. They stayed here until October 9 (*Gazette de France*).

have forgotten the past, but who nevertheless saw in one flash the state of affairs. "Ah, Madame! I am dying of colic!" And when Henriette had passed on, "Be quick," she cried to Boucher; "I want it to be all over before she comes back."

In her former experiences, she had been able to keep her child for at least a few hours. But this time a little girl was only just born when, stifling her cries, they carried her away. It was said (and although they come from a suspect source, these details are admissible) that the child once safe, La Vallière, feeling no longer responsible except for her own life, made an heroic sacrifice for the Queen's sake. Wishing to conceal from her Sovereign the injury she had done her in her own Palace, Louise ordered her room to be filled with plants and flowers, without caring in the least about the deadly effect of their emanations upon a woman in her condition; then dressed herself fully, received the visitors, played cards, and partook of *médianoche* in the evening. This second torture, worse than the first, lasted for twelve hours!¹

And there was another worry to brood over in silence. Louis, who hitherto at the supreme moment had contrived to be near, was not present. Having started that morning for Versailles, he visited, on the way back, a French lace-manufactory in the Rue Quincampoix, where he bought beautiful presents "for the ladies."

¹ *Gazette de France*, October, 1666. The little daughter born at Vincennes (October 2, 1669), was called Marie-Anne, afterwards Mlle de Blois.

THIRD PART

1667—1674

CHAPTER I

JANUARY, 1667—JUNE, 1667

THE end of this year 1666 and the beginning of 1667 beheld a great transformation in the character of Louis XIV. It had begun directly after his mother's death. Anne of Austria had a horror of war; Louis, on the contrary, desired it. Those military triumphs which had signalised his minority he could scarcely regard as his own.¹ What he wanted was a more actual thing: the glory of conquests and victories, personally won. Ever since he had definitely begun to reign, he had bestowed great attention on the reorganisation of his army, but this had been done, so to speak, "on the quiet." He had acted without saying anything—sometimes indeed he had said one thing while all the while he was doing another, so desirous was he of attracting no attention from rival powers. But from 1666 onwards, he changed his tactics: he dissimulated less, he began those inspections of his troops which made the Dutch Gazettes speak of him as a "Reviewer." At Saint-Germain, Fontainebleau, Vincennes, reviews figured largely in all festivities. As he could not inspect his troops unless they were assembled, nor assemble them without the knowledge of the public, Louis thought it well to invest these serious occasions with an appear-

¹ Monglat most adroitly conveys this idea of the King. See *Mémoires*, p. 358, Michaud Collection. See also GUY-PATIN, *Lettres*, v. III. pp. 218, 219, 220.

ance of frivolity. The ladies, for instance, rode to them *en amazones* ; scarves decked the cuirasses, ribbons fluttered round the weapons. . . And in pursuance of the same design, the King intended the autumn and winter entertainments to be magnificent.

Louise de La Vallière, only just recovered from her confinement, was swept into the whirl again. On October 1, the Court left Vincennes for Saint-Germain, there to rehearse the steps and figures for a new ballet—the ballet of the *Muses*—which was danced at Paris (January 2, 1667).¹ Benserade surpassed himself in delicate, subtle topical allusions, hitting off every one to perfection.

First the King :

"Ce berger n'est jamais sans quelque chose à faire,
Et jamais rien de bas n'occupe son loisir,
Soit plaisir, soit affaire ;
Mais l'affaire toujours va devant le plaisir.

La saison est passée,
Où les bergers dormoient sur la foi de leurs chiens.
Paissez, brebis, pendant qu'il s'apprête à détruire
Avec tant de vigueur tous les loups, s'il en vient,
Et laissez-vous conduire
A qui sçait mieux que vous tout ce qui vous convient."

Madame Henriette entered next, and the poet said :

"Elle vous prend d'abord, vous entraîne, vous tue,
Vous pille jusqu'à l'âme ; et puis, après cela,
Sans être émue,
Vous laisse là.

Telle erreur devrait être excusable et légère,
Qui trompe les plus fins et leur fait présumer

¹ 1667. Jan. 2nd, ballet interrupted by the Queen's accouchement ; 5th, pastoral ballet ; 6th, promenade at Versailles ; 8th–10th, ballet of the *Muses* ; 12th, ballet at Paris (Madame) ; 22nd, review at Houilles ; 24th, ball at Versailles ; 25th, ballet of *Muses* ; 30th, grand ball at the new Castle of Saint-Germain ; 31st, ballet of *Muses* ; Feb. 4th, review ; 5th, 14th, 16th, 19th, ballet of *Muses* ; 20th to 28th, Carnival at Versailles.

Qu'étant bergère,
On peut l'aimer.

Le meilleur sort
Qui s'en ensuive
Est d'être mort."

Would it be possible to evoke more daringly the exiled Guiche and Vardes!

The spectators had hardly recovered from the surprise of these transparent allusions before Mme de Montespan appeared as a shepherdess.

In the ballet of the *Naissance de Vénus* (1665) the Marquise "figured" an hour on a "well-regulated" clock. But in 1667, Benserade changed his tone, and ventured to be a little impertinent :

"Elle est prompte à la fuite
Et garde une conduite
Dont chacun est surpris ;
Mais nous en avons pris
Qui tenoient même route,
Et nous serions sans doute
Au comble du bonheur,
N'étoit son chien d'honneur :
Ce mot pourra déplaire :
Mais qui sçaurions-nous faire ? "

It is at least doubtful that the Marquis de Montespan was pleased by "this word!"

Quite differently was Mlle de La Vallière's entrance celebrated :

"Jeune bergère en qui le ciel a mis
Tout ce qu'il donne à ses meilleurs amis,
De la beauté, du cœur, de la sagesse,
Et, si j'en crois vos yeux, de la tendresse,
Vous me semblez l'ornement du hameau,
Et j'aime à voir dans un objet si beau,
Parfaitement l'une à l'autre assortie,
Et tant de gloire, et tant de modestie."

This was the last homage publicly offered to Louise. At the end, the poet made one of his wonderful allusions :

"Que vous peut-on souhaiter et quel bien ?
Je croy qu'il faut ne vous souhaiter rien.
L'on ne sçauroit croistre un bonheur extrême,
Et pour tout dire, enfin, que sçay-je mesme
Si, méritant tant de prospérez,
Vous n'avez point ce que vous méritez ?"

And when Mlle de La Vallière's dance was over, the King went and stood beside her. Assuredly no one could have dreamed, *that* day, that all the Powers of Evil had been invoked against our shepherd and our shepherdess ! And as there is no winter without some smiling days, so love does not die without some returning moments of its old beauty. Louise could still believe in the King's constancy. He gave her unequivocal proofs of his love. At this time his wife, Marie-Thérèse, was pregnant, and was keeping her room. Indefatigable Louis—husband and lover both !—went on dancing all the same. On January 2, he was ready dressed for the stage when he heard that the Queen was in travail ; he had only just time to change to ordinary clothes and hasten to her side.

As the crowning glory of the Carnival, great festivities were coming off at Versailles. Tables were prepared for all "masks" who should present themselves ; and the courtiers vied with the Sovereign in extravagance. Yet, despite these inducements, not more than three or four carriages came from Paris. The Gazettes declared, in prose and verse, that there were enormous crowds ; but the King, who knew the truth, was vexed that "nobody came to see his splendour." And masquerades were ceasing in Paris too, "but few people being festively inclined." The truth was that, beneath the mask, the public had caught a glimpse of the serious state of affairs. Louis was in bellicose mood. And six years had not been long enough to efface the public memory of those terrible wars : what if they should begin again, as the

result of that Spanish marriage, too-fragile bond of peace? The only hope lay in Colbert. Colbert, all for economy as he was known to be, would be sure to oppose military expenses—and so, in fact, Colbert did. But his resistance was feeble. Louis, supreme master at home, now craved for domination abroad.

In his diplomatic despatches, Louis XIV. assumed the part of a careful husband visiting Flanders to arrange a perfectly indubitable "succession" for his wife, but in reality he expected a sharp tussle before he got it.¹ Nor did the prospect displease him; he felt as excited as if it had been his first campaign. Once Lent was over, and the last factitious joys of Shrove Tuesday had died away, there commenced a sort of vigil of arms. . . . He was just twenty-seven, he had a tradition of bravery behind him and a keen desire to carry it on, he was "resolute to be in the thick of the danger," and now he began to ponder deeply and fervently on the thought of death, and to meditate a change in his private life. Hitherto a free-thinker, or at any rate a laggard at Confession (so much so that only his outward conformity remained), Louis, at the Easter of 1667, communicated "in his Parish Church."² Very probably it was as a consequence of this "almost death-bed" conversion that he at last resolved on something which he had been meditating for a year—something which enormously intrigued the Court, and Paris, and even Europe.

On Saturday, May 13, the Parliament in full assembly—and, next day, the *Chambre des comptes*—were advised

¹ See C. ROUSSET, *Histoire de Louvois*, v. I. p. 99. The eminent historian gives an admirable account of the situation in law and in fact.

² "At the hands of *sieur* Fiot, his ordinary Almoner" (*Gazette de France*, 1667, April 9, p. 367).

of Letters-Patent (already registered) : such Letters-Patent as had been unknown for fifty years.

“ Louis, by the Grace of God King of France and Navarre, to all present and to come, greeting.

“ Those benefits which Kings confer in their Realms being the outward mark of the merit of those who receive them, and the most glorious eulogy which such can enjoy, We have considered that We cannot better publicly express the very high esteem in which We hold the person of Our dear and well-beloved and very loyal Louise de La Vallière than by conferring upon her the loftiest honours which a very special affection, awakened in Our heart by an infinity of rare perfections, has for some years suggested to Us as desirable. And, although her modesty has frequently opposed Our wish to raise her sooner to a rank more proportionate with Our esteem and with her own good qualities, We now feel that Our affection and our sense of justice permit Us no longer to defer these tributes of our gratitude to a merit so well-known to Us, nor to refuse an outlet to Our tenderness for Marie-Anne, Our natural daughter. In the person of her mother, We have procured for and assigned to her the estate of Vaujours, situated in Lorraine, and the Barony of Saint-Christophe in Anjou—both equally rich in revenues and tenures ;

“ But, reflecting that Our favour would be incomplete if We did not enhance the value of these properties by a title at once conformable to Our esteem and to her merit—and remembering also that Our dear and well-beloved Louise de La Vallière is descended from a very noble and very ancient House, whose ancestors have on several important occasions given signal proofs of their zeal for the good and advantage of our State, and also of their talent and experience in the command of armies. . .”

Follows the formula for the creation of a *duché-pairie*, "to be enjoyed by the said Damoiselle Louise-Françoise de La Vallière, and, after her decease, by Marie-Anne, Our said daughter, her heirs and descendants both male and female, born in wedlock. . ." And the Letters ended in a clause of reversion of property : "Further, as Our Crown is the source of all favours, and as, that being so, such favours ought rightly to revert to it, We also desire that in case of the decease of Marie-Anne, Our daughter, without children or other descendants male or female, *either before or after her mother*, the property in this Duchy shall be preserved intact to the said Damoiselle Louise-Françoise de La Vallière, but on the condition that she cannot dispose of it, and that after her death, it and all its component parts shall revert to Our Crown, and that her heirs, successors, and assigns, other than Marie-Anne Our daughter, or the children descending from that daughter, whom We have declared and now declare legitimate and capable of all civil honours and effects, shall have no claim upon it whatsoever, either as titular heirs or in any other capacity of any sort or kind."

The mere perusal of the official report of the Parliamentary Sitting shows us that the affair was arranged and accepted beforehand : "On the motion of the Attorney-General on the debate (the Court) agrees and orders that the said Letters shall be registered at its Record-office, to be executed according to their form and tenor."¹

Posterity has been more scandalised by this act of

¹ The text of the Letters has been most accurately given by Père Anselme, and less accurately by Père Clément, *Réflexions sur la miséricorde*, v. II. p. 208. We insist on this point, because M. Clément's book has been frequently copied, and no heed paid to these errors. The book is otherwise very conscientiously done, as was all M. Clément's work.

authority than contemporaries were, including even Marie-Thérèse; and that is because posterity knows of later acts of the same description, only infinitely more odious. For whereas we perceive to-day only a scandal and the victory of passion over decency, in 1667 people saw a beginning of better things, such as a return to orderly conduct, or at the very least a reaction from disorder, and, as it were, the redemption of a youthful error. The King had told the Queen that he would settle down at thirty—and now it seemed that he was a year in advance of his promise.

We have no desire to represent the legitimization of a natural child, born in adultery, as an excessively edifying proceeding, but we must point out that the declaration in these Letters-Patent is made with a certain degree of reticence. Compare it with the effrontery of Henri IV., for example: "We say and proclaim that César is our natural son, and that we have legitimated and do now legitimate him, and have conferred and do now confer upon him this title and honour of legitimacy by these presents."¹ Louis was one day to imitate the ancestral hardihood; but, before he reached that stage, six years of adulation and false passion were necessary.² In 1667, though he might already regard himself as the incarnation of the laws of his country, he still retained some respect for his own omnipotence. It was a kind of conscientiousness, as it were.³ And Louis himself has made the meaning of these Letters quite clear in the *Mémoires* which he dictated for the Dauphin. "Having no intention of keeping out of danger when I was with the Army, I thought it right to ensure to this

¹ Letters of legitimization for César de Vendôme, January, 1595. *Recueil des pièces pour et contre les princes légitimes*, v. III. p. 81.

² See legitimization of the Duc du Maine. *Recueil*, v. II. p. 372.

³ "Bastardy can hold up its head henceforth," says M. Dreyas, in his Introduction to the *Mémoires de Louis XIV.*, p. 106. Nearly all modern historians have judged this trait erroneously.

child the honours of her parentage, and to give the mother an establishment suitable to the affection I had felt towards her for six years." There is the true truth. War, with all its solemnity, had proved to be the one revelation for our Royal egotist. Louise had almost nothing that could be called her own, except her jewels. Before May 14, her daughter had no name but Marie-Anne, and, having no legal life, was incapable of any inheritance.¹ After the publication of these Letters, Louise became a Duchess, and Marie-Anne had the right to be called La Vallière.² As to the incomes of the Duchy, which were worth a hundred thousand francs a year, the original Letters settled them exclusively on the King's daughter. Nothing could be clearer than that the lawyer was thinking only of the Royal offspring. She alone was proprietress of Vaujours, the usufruct of which only reverted to the mother if her daughter died, and died childless.³

The Letters of 1667 say truly that Louise, in her modesty, had rather avoided than solicited the Royal favours. The poor lady had no idea of what was now being done. The estate of Vaujours, which the King was supposed to be giving her, was unknown to her even by name. One of Colbert's numerous provincial agents, always on the watch for bargains, had doubtless bought it *sub rosa*. There is convincing proof of this. The deed of purchase bears indeed the same date

¹ Jurisprudence had grown very rigid about bastards. See *Recueil général des pièces touchant l'affaire des princes légitimes et légitimés*, v. III. p. 244.

² M. Dreyss (*l.c.* p. 6) says erroneously that Marie-Anne was thenceforth called *Mademoiselle de Blois*. She only received this title later. We must add that the contemporary writer, Pellisson, also made a mistake about this (*Histoire de Louis XIV.*, v. II. p. 149).

³ We have gathered this curious fact—the hesitation in the King's mind and in Colbert's—solely from an analysis of the Letters-Patent. A contemporary account, which we know only in manuscript, affirms that there were two Letters-Patent. If that is so, we have only the *second* edition. One would like to verify the point, if it were possible.

as the Letters of Legitimation—but the date is fictitious. The index to the notary's papers still exists. And the mention of the deed was inserted—*afterwards*.¹

The new Duchess's first feeling was not pride, but shame. Had she not, at Vincennes, when but newly arisen from child-bed, risked her life to save her reputation?—and now here was her error published, registered in perpetuity! But imagine her distress, her amazement, her grief, when reflection—or the cruel kindness of a friend?—revealed the true meaning of the Royal, written words: when she realised that, turned into a Duchess and proclaimed the mother of a King's daughter, she had no less publicly lost the love of the father of her child! Even if she had tried to deceive herself about these Letters, in which Louis, so liberal towards the child, almost neglected the mother's interests, the whole Court would quickly have let her know that she was forsaken. Almost immediately after they were made public, her retirement was also announced: she was to go to Fontainebleau "and there await the King's orders." And there was fresh talk of marrying her. 'Twas said that Vardes, her old enemy, had obtained his pardon, and that his return was the prelude to his marrying the repudiated mistress, now enriched and titled. . . In such critical moments, past events, hitherto disregarded or misread, suddenly take a new and unmistakable significance. Louise remembered that her brother had been appointed Brigadier-General, that her uncle had been given the Bishopric of Nantes—and other marks of Royal favour were similarly transformed into sad and certain symptoms of abandonment. For in such fashion do the great dismiss their servants when these have ceased to please them.

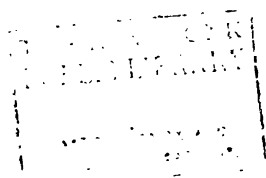
¹ The index exists in the office of M. Vassel, a Paris notary. Le Fouin, to whom this office belonged in 1667, was Notary to the King; he probably owed his position to Mazarin's influence.



*Louise Françoise de la Baume Le
Blanc, Duchesse de la Vallière*

After the picture by G. Edelinck.

LOUISE DE LA VALLIÈRE.



And moreover, think of the moment which this master, King, lover, sole conqueror of her heart, had selected for the announcement of the rupture! The unhappy woman knew that once again the Royal blood had mingled with her own to form another Royal bastard. Did the King know it? The King knew it; and, while he conferred legal existence upon Marie-Anne, he seemed quite to forget her mother—and was not such oblivion the very disowning beforehand of this last pledge of their love? Inevitably we pore over that clause in the Letters-Patent which ordains that the Duchy shall revert to La Vallière in case of the pre-decease of her daughter, “but that her heirs, [that is, Louise’s] successors, and assigns, other than Marie-Anne . . . shall have no claim upon it whatsoever.” What! the girl a Duchess well-endowed—and the boy a miserable bastard!

But the master had spoken. He had ordered an equipage for the Duchess, and now desired that she should display her new honours in the Queen’s own carriage. Marie-Thérèse, pitiful of misfortune, and credulous enough to believe in the Royal repentance, showed a new kindness towards the forsaken creature. She regarded this *duché-pairie* as a symbol of rupture. And that very knowing young woman, La Grande Mademoiselle, cleverly delineated the consequence of the legitimation of Marie-Anne: “We shall hear of no more babies! . . .” No more babies! And La Vallière had been pregnant for five months.

From May 14 to 24, the poor lady followed the Court “as a Duchess,” and every day brought the definite separation nearer. The King would soon be setting off at the head of his Army, to risk his life without having made any provision for the coming child. The Army was to march on the 24th, and on that date, there is a letter signed by Louise, and

addressed to Mme de Montausier, her old friend, then Superintendent of the Queen's household. Did the new Duchess actually write this letter? We cannot be sure; but there is no doubt at all that it accurately represents the state of her mind.

"May 24, 1667.

"MADAME,

"The new anxieties caused by my new grandeur render so impossible to me that tranquil state of mind in which I had hoped to encounter it, that (as I can no longer conceal from myself how uneasy I feel), I have resolved to appeal to your friendship and to impart to you—hoping that it may relieve my mind—the reflections I have lately been making.

"Kindly-disposed masters, when they are parting with their servants, are accustomed to pay them their wages before they dismiss them—or at any rate to make some recognition of their services. I fear that this is just what is happening to me. The King, with this great honour, hopes to induce me to go quietly by feeding my vanity—so that, ambition conquering love, I may endure my shame with greater fortitude. Very well I know that good fortune has its limits beyond which one cannot hope to reach, and that the degree I have attained being the highest to which a person of my birth could aspire, it is impossible that I should continue at such a height without some reverses—which can come to me only through the King's waning affection.¹

"The kingdom of France—nay! I might say, all Europe—knows that my attachment was disinterested

¹ "But, at any rate, however my evil fortune reaches me, I see that it is inevitable. The King is mistaken, though, if he thinks that ambition can efface my love. Ambition was not its mother; nor can ambition be its tyrant. This new glittering glory can commit no parricide!" (Part of text relegated to a note.)

from the first, and continued so ; and that the King's Crown was the least of his attractions for me.

"I have received much from his generous hands. I believed that I could not refuse, just as I have always believed that I could not ask ; for his great affection for me made all his benefits acceptable. This recent, bitterly-wounding suggestion of my marriage with Vardes justifies my suspicious apprehension ; and the cordiality of the Queen's attitude seems a tacit request to me for my consent to that step. But she does not know that my heart says *No* more loudly even than my personal antipathy, and that I *cannot* break the oath I made—' never to change in my love ; never to marry.'

"Permit me, Madame, to make a little digression on the subject of this marriage. I will put my feelings entirely aside, and speak quite reasonably, in so far as my feeble intelligence allows.

"I now bear the title of Duchesse de Vaujours. I enjoy all the prerogatives belonging to that rank. I have the right of the *tabouret* in the Queen's presence. I rank with the other Duchesses. I am no longer La Vallière.¹ The King has recognised our offspring ; my daughter is legitimated ; if I marry now, my husband will be one of the foremost men in the Kingdom.

"No, Madame ! I am wrong—I am not a Duchess. The Duchy is a Royal gift to my daughter, recognised and legitimated by the King, her father ; *my* administration, *my* enjoyment of the prerogatives of *her* Duchy is a mere pretence, which would ruin me if I built upon it in any way. I must yield all to her as soon

¹ This is, as it were, an echo of a song of 1663 or 1664 :

" Et cependant quoique je luy sois chère,
Je suis La Valière, moy,
Je suis La Valière."

Manuscrit du temps, p. 283.

as she comes of age—and be just La Vallière once more.

“Where is the gentleman foolish enough to marry a Duchess without becoming a Duke ; to be stepfather to a natural daughter of the King, without any corresponding honours ? . . . There are too many complications here ! The King’s interests and my daughter’s interests, my possible husband’s interests and my interests—no, no ! you must agree with me that the thing is impossible, and that any suggestions about it are simply ridiculous. . .¹

“Nevertheless, if you take the trouble to look into the state of my affairs, you will see that I am an object of compassion, and you will pity me beforehand for all the anxieties that are surely in store for me.

“The King is mortal—and he is going to battle. Suppose he should be killed—or that, through violent fatigues, he should contract some mortal malady—what would become of me ? There would be no middle course. I should have to go to Vaujours and accept my fate : bury myself in a distant province, settle myself down to rustic existence, and pass the rest of my life with my daughter the Duchess, in regrets and tears, without a friend to console and help me. Alas ! I feel secretly that, after such an event, I should neither have strength nor courage to survive—and even that it would be the best thing I could do, to die.

“But then—what would become of the Royal child

¹ “Oh, I give rein to my love again ! I rejoice, it inspires me, to perceive that after all the whole thing is only a fresh proof of my lover’s constancy ! Under this pretence, he calls the world to witness his indifference, while all the while he is really drawing closer still the bonds between us, those bonds which death alone can break. . . You see my weakness, and you will be able to give it a name : like all loving souls, I deceive myself, I flatter myself with my humiliations, rather than accept them for what they are.” (Relegated to a note in the text.)

I am to bear? You know of that: I told you the secret as soon as I knew it myself—five months ago. The King knows it, too, and said it would be a boy this time—yet he has done nothing either for the child or the mother. What joy can I have, then, in *this* anticipation? The difference between the brother and the sister! She, Duchess and legitimate; he, an unrecognised bastard! I cannot face this prospect—yet only preparation for it can make it endurable if it comes true. The very thought of it tortures me, but I have too much trust in the God of . . .¹ not to believe that I shall see my King again, in good health and covered with glory—and not only that, but with all his old affection for me.

“However it be, life is uncertain, and my anxiety ineludible. Every post will make me shudder from this day forward; and my imagination, already the prey of terrors, shows me nothing but hideous dreams of fresh mortification. Sleep, which usually can charm away care, for me serves but to augment it; if I wake and find my dreams are only dreams, I shall merely think *that* a bad omen too; and so imaginary troubles will be as bad as real ones. . . Sometimes I see the Queen reproaching me, and accusing me of the King’s indifference to herself; sometimes I see her ordering me to get into my carriage and retire instantly to Vaujours, ‘forbidden the Court from henceforth.’ Another time she sends me to a convent—and so on, through all the thousand torments that slumber brings to distracted spirits. . . I want your help more than anything else in the world—your help and your wise counsel; it has always consoled me so much that I conjure you to come to my aid in this evil hour. Believe me, it will be to your interest. I shall never

¹ This word is missing in the *Recueil* of M. Matter, whence this letter is copied.

cease to work on your behalf, so that you may have perpetual occasion to realise that I am, my dearest Madame, your very faithful friend and servant,

"LA DUCHESSE DE VAUJOURS."

Probably this letter was arranged by some friend ; but it is certain that it must be a faithful delineation of what, in 1667, was Louise de La Vallière's state of mind. Is it not the very echo of the supreme appeal in that tender, tortured soul ?

The appeal was not heard : Louise de La Vallière was forbidden to follow the Court to Compiègne. This was equivalent to ordering her to retire to her own abode. For all her blazoned equipage, for all her Ducal honours, what a return that must have been ! She was only twenty years old, and she was to go back alone to Versailles, to live near that Palace where once each embellishment had been but a fresh flattery to her beauty, where every tree and bush had seen its hour of love. . . Now she was there, abandoned—and not even her daughter might she have as consolation. Mme Colbert was keeping the child for the King.¹

Nevertheless, Louise's appeal was not wholly fruitless. The Letters-Patent were modified. A clause was inserted saying that the Duchy belonged to Madame de La Vallière, and, "after her decease," to Marie-Anne, her daughter. But, on the other hand, they did not omit those contradictory words which provided that "in case of the decease of Marie-Anne, either *before or after her mother*," the property would revert to Louise de La Vallière, on the condition that she could not dispose of it. To sum up : her material

¹ Mlle DE MONTPENSIER, v. IV. p. 47. The other version of these memoirs seems to say the contrary ; but that version, arranged by a secretary, frequently mitigates the truth !

necessities were ensured, and her peace of mind almost wholly unprovided-for.

On May 24, while the humiliated favourite was sadly wending her way back to Paris, the King was definitely setting out to war. In a fortnight he reduced a certain number of places to submission—notably Charleroi. So that, on June 9, word came that he had summoned the Court to join him, and that he was coming to meet it himself as far as Avesnes. Instantly the opposition-party (which had always existed under one form or another) began to find fault with Turenne for having cut short his operations, attributing this to ambitious motives; while the King was censured for having interrupted his own successful career, just because he wanted to see his mistress again. These reproaches were both unmerited. Turenne stopped because his troops—assembled for a mere military display—were exhausted and needed rest. And Louis returned to Avesnes, because, having nothing better to do,¹ he was very glad to show himself as a warrior to the ladies—and especially to *one*, who was not La Vallière.

But in her solitude at Versailles, Louise soon heard of this excursion. In her solitude, alas! she was not alone, since a little life was pulsing beneath her heart—more forgotten even than herself, if possible. She could not bear it! She set out “unsummoned,”²

¹ “Seeing that there was nothing for me to do in camp, I took the opportunity of returning to my frontier, where the Queen was also expected” (*Mémoires de Louis XIV.*, v. II. p. 251).

² D'ORMESSON, *Journal*, v. II. p. 506. There is a passage in the historical fragments left by Racine which says: “The late Madame persuaded Mlle de La Vallière, who was at Mouchy, to join the Queen, and lent her a carriage.” But this detail is falsified by the accurate text of Mlle de Montpensier, to whom La Vallière said that “she had come from Versailles” (*Mémoires*, v. IV. p. 78). La Vallière may have passed through Mouchy, and been encouraged by Madame.

accompanied only by her sister-in-law, a charming, warm-hearted woman, whose devotion was not forgotten in the coming days.

The Queen, on her side, having left Compiègne, had arrived at La Fère on June 20. That very day she was playing cards, as usual—she was very fond of cards. Suddenly there was a little stir. Mademoiselle, always on the watch, went out on some pretext, to see what it was about. They told her: “Mme de La Vallière is expected to-night!” The news spoilt all Marie-Thérèse’s good-humour. And next morning, in very truth, there were Louise, her sister-in-law, and the d’Artigny damsel, now Comtesse du Roure—all sitting on their boxes in the Queen’s apartments! They had not slept the night before, and were dropping with fatigue. Mademoiselle asked them if they had seen the Queen, and, on their saying they had not, she returned to the room where Marie-Thérèse was dressing.

Marie-Thérèse was noble-natured, but she was also jealous and easily-influenced; and now, once more, she was skilfully induced to be furious with Louise. She could not get dressed—she could do nothing but feel jealous. She wept, she swooned, she “had a turn”—and with her were three ladies, the Princesse de Bade, Mme de Montausier, and Mme de Montespan, who said over and over again, in unison, “Just look at the state the Queen is in!”

When the hour for Mass arrived, Marie-Thérèse went into the Royal pew, and ordered the door to be shut, lest La Vallière should follow her. Louise had stayed below, with the crowd. But, despite all the precautions, she approached the Queen as the latter was getting into her carriage. The Queen did not speak to her. Anger was growing under this silence, to such an extent that at the *dînée* the Sovereign



After the picture in the collection of Baron Hottinguer.

GABRIELLE GLÉ DE LA COTARDAIS.
(Marquise De La Vallière.)

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uttered this harsh command : " They are to send her nothing to eat ! " Villacerf, the *maître d'hôtel*, did not dare to obey.

All the way along the road, they talked of nothing but La Vallière. Mme de Montespan said : " I wonder at her audacity in presenting herself before the Queen without knowing how she would be received ; assuredly the King did not summon her. " Mme de Bade and Mme de Montausier exclaimed at the bare idea. In fact, everybody was puzzling over the strange arrival. Mme de Montespan also said : " Heaven preserve me from being the King's mistress ! But if I was, I should feel ashamed before the Queen. " Marie-Thérèse kept crying. As for Mlle de Montpensier, she was an adept at holding her tongue—and she held it then.

At Guise the Duchess, feeling the hostile atmosphere around her, did not appear at the *couchée*. And, ever angrier and angrier, " the Queen forbade that any one should present herself, and ordered the troops which had come to meet her to give no escort to any one. " However, when they got near Avesnes, the King, coming to meet the ladies, was perceived on the rising ground. Then Louise broke all bounds. " She ordered her carriage to drive across the fields at full speed. The Queen wanted to send and stop her ; she was terribly angry. " ¹

She would have been appeased if she could have seen how coldly the King greeted the poor lady. And

¹ Here is the *Gazette's* account of it : " This Princess (the Queen) was received by the King at the head of his Guards, the rest of the troops being drawn up in battle-array near the town and along the road ; after some conversation between their Majesties, with all signs of the greatest affection, the Queen proceeded onwards in her carriage, wherein were seated Mademoiselle, the Princess de Bade, the Duchesse de Montausier, and some other ladies. The King then continued his march on horseback at the head of his troops " (*Gazette*, 1667, p. 582).

when they arrived at Avesnes, he paid only the most formal of visits to Mme de La Vallière, who did not join the Court-circle that evening, doubtless to avoid reproaches. But the King was displeased at that, for he considered himself sole arbiter of social arrangements. The next day, the Duchess presented herself to accompany the Queen to Mass, and although the carriage was full, those who were in it sat close so as to make room for her. On that day also she dined at the Royal table. These were, however, merely the honours due to her rank. In reality, Louis was sacrificing both his Queen and his mistress to a new idol. All the good Lenten resolutions were forgotten; the brisk atmosphere of the camp, the animation of the soldier's life, had quickly laughed away penitence.

During the four or five days spent at Avesnes (July 9-14, 1667), Mlle de Montpensier, that knowing spinster of forty, perceived many things. "Mme de Montespan," she says, "left me to play (with the Queen). She was lodging with Mme de Montausier, in one of her rooms, which was next to the King's apartment; and it was remarked that there *had* been a sentinel on a step which was between the two, but that he had been removed. The King often stayed quite alone in his room, and Mme de Montespan did not appear in the Queen's suite." That is all Mademoiselle says, but it is enough.

However, being advised of the recovery of his troops, the King set out again for Charleroi on the 14th.¹ During the six days' rest, moreover, he had spent half his time in reviews, in visiting fortifications,

¹ Mademoiselle, in her *Mémoires*, says that two or three days were spent at Avesnes (v. IV. p. 50). Louis, in *his* (v. II. p. 302), implies that it was four. The truth is that he arrived on the 9th and left on the 14th (*Archives historiques du Nord*, 2nd series).

in "soldiering"—in short, his new passion, which though it was not going to exclude the others, *was* going, for long, to predominate. As to the Queen, the devotions of Corpus Christi and the following Sunday took up every moment of her time. She was a good woman, but she had no insight, and all her bitter feeling was for La Vallière, who was already forsaken, and more deserving of pity than of anger.

The favourite knew she was forsaken, and, like the Queen, she did not know for whom. Her rival pretended to be her friend. On the return to Compiègne, the *cortège* passed by Notre-Dame de Liesse, and there Mme de La Vallière and Mme de Montespan went to confession together. Perhaps the official sinner, bearing the secret evidence of yet another error, may have envied the unburdened conscience with which her beautiful companion, so sure of herself and her virtue—yet, at the same time, a client of la Voisin and of the assassin Guibourg—must have approached the place of repentance!

There is food for reflection here on the inaccuracy of human judgment, and the consequent errors of history. During the Avesnes expedition, when Louise was counting her days by their humiliations, more than one of her biographers, even the admiring ones, observed and severely censured, "the insensate haughtiness and wicked vanity of the Duchesse de La Vallière."¹

¹ P. CLÉMENT, *Réflexions*, v. I., Preface. M. Dreyss (Introduction to the *Mémoires*, p. 7), speaks of the audacity of the Duchess, "who still thinks she is passionately beloved."

CHAPTER II

JULY, 1667—FEBRUARY, 1668

WHILE poor discouraged La Vallière returned to Paris, Mme de Montespan remained at Compiègne with the Court until the end of July, awaiting events.

In less than a month, the King was master of both Tournai and Douai. But, in gaining this end, he once more exhausted the strength of his inexperienced soldiers. "Finally, to avoid being idle," he made a tour to Compiègne, and even went as far as Saint-Cloud¹ to see Madame, who had nearly died from the effects of a miscarriage. La Vallière did not make an opportunity of seeing him—it would have been of no use, since the King's thoughts were now full of some one else. He hastily returned to the Court. Giving up his own room to Mlle de Montpensier, he was content with the anteroom, which gave easy access to the Marquise de Montespan's apartments. He was with her all day and all the evening, and the "evenings" lasted on into the mornings.

Once, at dinner, the Queen complained that he stayed up too late, and, speaking to Mademoiselle, said, "The King does not go to bed until four

¹ July 6, Monsieur went to see Madame at Saint-Cloud; July 10, the King at Compiègne; July 16, the King goes to see Madame at Saint-Cloud (*Gazette*, 1667, p. 690, 737). Madame, then ill, did not recover until August 5 (D'ORMESSON, *Journal*, v. II. p. 511).

o'clock, when it is broad daylight. I don't know what he can find to amuse him."

"I read despatches and answer them," replied the King.

"But surely you could do that some other time?"

Louis turned his head away to conceal a smile. The people present gazed at their plates. After dinner, as usual, they went for a walk. "Mme de Montespan came too. The King was exceptionally gay."

However, if Louis failed in some of his duty towards his wife, he never lost sight of her well-being as regards her dowry. He even went to war to put Marie-Thérèse in possession of her inheritance. He took her to Douai and Tournai to show her to the populations conquered in her name. This done, he achieved another conquest—that of the Lady-in-Waiting. The Queen remained blind to it all. She went to every church, visited every convent. Her Lady only "followed" her to mass, and when questioned in the evening, the hypocrite "said she had been asleep all day." At last the King, getting ready for the Siege of Lille, sent the Court back to Arras. The Queen went on being very friendly with the Montespan, who was undoubtedly full of resource, able to turn anything into a joke. Risky stories were not in fashion just then, but a visit to an institution where little girls were brought up and trained to work was sufficient to keep up her spirits. In the evening she imitated the little peasants before the Queen "in the most ridiculous way in the world." And how could anybody mistrust such a bright madcap!

About this time, the Queen got a letter which she innocently spoke of next day to Mme de Montausier, to Mademoiselle, and even to Mme de Montespan herself.

"I have received a letter telling me many things which I don't believe. It tells me that the King is

in love with Mme de Montespan, that he no longer cares for La Vallière, and that Mme de Montausier has brought this about ; that she is deceiving me ; that the King was never out of her house at Compiègne—in short, it says everything to convince me and make me hate her. I do not believe it, and have sent the letter to the King.”

To this unexpected confidence, each of the ladies characteristically replied. Mademoiselle de Montpensier, sure of herself, was content with the remark, “Your Majesty has acted quite rightly.” Mme de Montespan spoke strongly of her obligations towards the Queen, the kindnesses she had received—and then, following the usual tactics, she added that she guessed where the letter came from. As for that austere lady, the Duchesse de Montausier, she repeated what she had said a few days before : “Since they accuse *me* of procuring mistresses for the King, there is no one to whom they will not do a bad turn.”¹ And the Queen replied, “I see many things. I am not so blind as they think, but I am prudent.” Never was claim less justified ! “The Queen treated Mme de Montespan better than ever.” The King, who never tolerated interference in his private affairs, soon afterwards dismissed Mme d’Armagnac from the Court. She was supposed to have been the author of the anonymous letter.

On September 10, 1667, Louis returned to Saint-Germain, after an easy victory. No one could reproach him with putting on the airs of a conqueror. “He is the most modest person on earth. . . The part of conquering hero, which he might well play, seems to have imbued him with more sweetness than vanity.”

¹ In a song of the time, to the air of *Ron relon ton*; Mme de Montausier is cruelly alluded to.

“La Montausier passe pour m——”

MSS. du temps, p. 315 : *penès nos*.



After a drawing by Pételle.

THE OLD CASTLE OF SAINT-GERMAIN IN 1658.

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Mme de Longueville, a good and unprejudiced judge, writes this testimony to the King, and her feminine eyes noticed another detail which might have escaped more profound politicians. Till now, Louis had spoken very little to the ladies. His manners had been wanting in frankness and gaiety. A few bows, a polite answer when they spoke to him—nothing more. He never addressed them first. "But now it was quite different; he commenced, and kept up the conversation, like any other man."¹

We might write, "Here endeth the Youth of Louis XIV."

It was Madame de Montespan who had taught Louis this assurance; she had accustomed him to gallant behaviour, and taught him to converse; indeed, she had transformed the timid lover of the timid Louise de La Vallière into a conquering hero, self-confident, victorious over women as easily as over men.

Louise was then at Saint-Germain. Maternal instinct drew her near to the father of her daughter, Marie-Anne, and of the little child who was coming. What fate awaited this gift of gone-by love? Was the acknowledged mother of a King's daughter, legally recognised and titled, to bring a bastard into the world? That cruel uncertainty was not spared to the poor lady, more miserable with her title and her money than when she had been only La Vallière. She was taken ill at Saint-Germain, and had to stifle her moans just as she had had to do at Vincennes. She was confined "in secret" on Saturday, October 3, and had a son,² who was immediately carried away, and whose existence was for a long time kept

¹ Mme de Longueville's letter to Mme de Sablé, Sept. 15, 1667. See COUSIN, *Madame de Sablé*, p. 382, edition 1854.

² Mlle DE MONTPENSIER, v. IV. p. 62. "Everybody suspected that her confinement had occurred. In fact they knew it, and she would have liked to keep it secret."

dark. As at Vincennes, she was obliged to pretend to live her ordinary life. On that very Saturday evening they had *médianoche* in her room. It might well have been of her that these words were written: "Thou shalt bring forth thy children in sorrow."

The physical anguish lasts only for a day, and a mother forgets it quickly in the sight of her baby, but Mme de La Vallière had not that consolation. Moreover, both before and after her son's birth, she was consumed with anxiety. For more than a year, Louis had done nothing to reassure the unhappy mother. Prudence had replaced tenderness. One recalls Mademoiselle's remark, when La Vallière was raised to the rank of Duchess: "We shall hear of no more babies." The Princess Palatine has left a too-probable explanation of this conduct: "They had made the King believe that the child was not his."¹ That this was said is quite possible, but it is inconceivable that Louis can have believed it. It was at most a pretext under which he hid his real designs, to whose ruthless development his former mistress had to submit.

From the end of 1667 to the beginning of 1674—seven whole years—Louise de La Vallière's life was mixed up with the Montespan's. Athénais, though, took first place, and filled it superbly. We have no knowledge of when this new reign began. Who can ever say the exact moment when a coquette yields?

¹ *Correspondance de la Duchesse d'Orléans*, v. I. p. 306. "When one of the Montespan's children died, the King was deeply moved; but he was not touched by the death of the poor little Comte de Vermandois, for the Montespan and the old woman made him believe the child was not his, but Lauzun's; but it would have been well if all the King's bastards had been his as undoubtedly as that one; Mme de La Vallière was not a giddy, deceiving mistress, as she showed by her repentance and the remorse which lasted to the end of her life. She was a sweet, good, gentle, tender creature. She had not loved the King for ambition, but had had a sincere passion for him, and never loved any one else during her whole life."

Eyes, words, and thoughts, if not the heart, may have committed adultery a thousand times, yet the woman can still say she has done no wrong. Here is an account hitherto unpublished, and very likely to be true. "The first time the King saw her privately was by surprise, and was not arranged by her. Mme d'Hûdicourt always slept with her, and one evening, when Mme de Montespan was in bed first, Mme d'Hûdicourt, who was in the King's confidence, left the room, upon which the King entered, disguised as a Swiss of M. de Montausier's."¹ Love, on that occasion, wore a very ugly livery!

But Mortemart's daughter, though she had long since dethroned her rival, was afraid of her still. Never having loved, she could never feel sure of being loved. No matter how much they talked of her triumphant beauty, her delightful wit, and her inexhaustible brilliancy, she felt uneasy always before the emaciated beauty of Louise, and especially before her true-hearted sincerity. Never has a hypocritical love so frankly confessed its inferiority. This beautiful, brilliant woman could feel no assurance, except when she was with the chiromancer and her acolytes, the magicians!²

Towards the end of 1667, the visits to the hideous den in the Rue Beauregard recommenced. La Voisin sold love-powders. Calcined bones of toads, calcined moles' teeth,³ and human dust all entered into these extra-

¹ *Abrégé de l'histoire de France*, v. IV. p. 22. MSS. in our own library, the work of President Hénault, who had been in the confidence of the Marshal de Villeroi. See his *Mémoires*, p. 18.

² See the clear and overwhelming deposition of Voisin's daughter, Aug. 13, 1680 (*Archives de la Bastille*, v. VI. p. 289).

³ Lesage got moles for Philbert, a rival of la Voisin's (*Archives de la Bastille*, v. V. p. 287). La Voisin distilled toads, and was nearly suffocated one day in the midst of this charming occupation.

ordinary mixtures ; the shameless creature even added drugs to make the effect more unfailing. One of la Voisin's contractors had a recipe in which cantharides was mixed with dried prunes and the filings of iron. Perhaps it was that which caused the hysterics of which the King complained, and which the doctors could not understand !

But all these philtres were not enough for Mme de Montespan. Lesage, the learned friend of la Voisin, insisted upon the great difference between sorcery and magic. To the use of these powders, he opposed charms and incantations. In that lay *his* talent, and *his* particular profit.¹ In more than one case, Lesage seems to have acted in a rather brutal manner towards his partner, whose *clientèle* he was taking away. But, as regards the Marquise, there was no appearance of doing so. She could not have too many chiromancers and magicians around her. The clever rascal brought her to his house, where the priest Mariette, less loathsome than Guibourg, celebrated Masses less bloody than those at the Castle of Villebousin, but quite as impious. This devil's den was in the Rue de la Tannerie, a few steps from the Place de Grève, and in sight of the Pillory. They dressed an altar in a little room, and Mariette, clothed in all his ornaments, proceeded to deliver incantations. Lesage sang the *Veni, Creator* ; Mariette read a gospel over the Marquise's head, who, kneeling under the stole, repeated the conjuration against La Vallière.²

¹ He pretended afterwards that he took away la Voisin's customers to prevent their being deceived by her (Interrogation of Lesage, Nov. 15, 1680 ; *Archives de la Bastille*, v. VI, pp. 357, 359). Thus he described himself to Mme de Polignac as a magician who could do her business better without any fear of compromising her (*The confronting of la Voisin and Lesage*, Jan. 16, 1680).

² It would be well to read La Reynie's report (*Archives de la Bastille*, v. IV, pp. 126, 33) and the interrogation of Lesage and Mariette (v. VI, pp. 357, 359, 381, 386).

These ceremonies took up so much time that the Lady-in-Waiting was not always free to work with the magicians, so they found a means by which she might act alone. They asked her to bring two pigeons' hearts. Over these hearts Mariette said Mass—a real Mass this time—in the very church of Saint-Séverin! He passed them under the chalice. Then the Marquise followed Mariette and Lesage into their room, and they conspired once more against La Vallière. The two hearts were enclosed in a silver-gilt box with a paper containing *l'Evangile des rois*, some words of a hymn, *Ortus refulget Lucifer*, a star, and a little consecrated wafer. Athénaïs in future could "make her conspiracy in private."

That was not all. In the beginning of 1668, Lesage and Mariette had the audacity to go to the Castle at Saint-Germain, to the very house which Mme de Thianges, their client's sister, occupied. The priest, in a surplice and stole, began by sprinkling holy water, then read the gospel over the Marquise's head, while Lesage made fumigations and burnt incense. The ceremony ended, as usual, with the formula against La Vallière. The cynical rascals confessed it later. "The King's name was mentioned, as well as Mme de La Vallière's. They entreated the love of the King, and the death of Mme de La Vallière."¹

Everything went well for Mme de Montespan. It was enough to make the magicians themselves believe in their own arts! Moreover, in January, an unexpected piece of luck came their way. The

¹ "Mariette said they only asked that she might be sent away" (M. DE LA REYNIE, *Mémoires*). The very curious documents connected with the trial of these poisoners go on to tell of a similar occasion when Mme de Polignac was mentioned. But a very careful study has shown me that Lesage and Mariette did indeed go through the same proceedings for both these superstitious ladies. La Reynie knew that well, and about this whole affair his testimony holds good.

"beautiful comedy of *Amphitryon*" was played. Molière¹ had imitated it freely, and greatly improved upon the original. It has since been thought that this work was written by command; but the King, still secretive, would have forbidden any such allusions, and Molière, always prudent, would not have dared to include them. But, though accidental, the coincidence was not the less amusing. In one respect, especially, Louis resembled Jove. Like him, he could keep up a mystery about an illicit love-affair, with the help of a Saint-Aignan, "Duc de Mercure, a Duke and Duchess of Montausier," and several others. At the very same time (November, 1667—January, 1668) our mysterious and artful King made an incomparably clever political move. He allowed a public ballet to divulge part of his warlike schemes, thus dissimulating the better their near and startling realisation.

At Paris, the *Mascarade Royal* was danced on January 18, 1668. The King represented "Pleasure" first, and then a serious part.

"Voyez de quelle grâce en cadence il se meut,
Il n'est pas de cœur qu'il n'entraîne.
Enfin, c'est un plaisir de reine,
Et n'en goûte pas qui veut."

And while the King danced, the poet sang of Spain :

"Elle doit cet hyver détourner ses malheurs ;
Sinon, au retour du Zéphire,
Je crains qu'elle n'ait lieu de dire :
Pour un plaisir mille douleurs."

In reality, under this guise of merry-making, a very serious diligent King, indefatigable as regards work, was concealing an approaching campaign. Fifteen days later, without even "awaiting the Zephyr," but as soon as Condé was ready, he left, (February 2,

¹ An imitation of Plautus' comedy had already been attempted by Rotrou (*La Vie de M. de Molière*, by GRIMAREST, in the *Œuvres de M. de Molière*, Paris, 1718, v. I. p. 55).

1668) alone this time, and not in a carriage,¹ but on horseback, like a soldier.

The Queen had returned to Saint-Germain ; Mme de Montespan was there in her official position. La Vallière had followed her, and was commencing her purgatory on earth. Occasionally the two ladies went for walks in the Park with Mademoiselle. There was no appearance of discord, or even of distrust. Besides, the King allowed no time for such complications to arise. Scarcely had they heard of his arrival on the scene of battle before he announced his return. In twenty-two days he had taken Franche-Comté, showing much bravery and ardour.

Money-troubles and annoyances, worse companions than la Voisin, then laid hold of haughty Athénais.

On March 1, 1668, Maîtres Crespin and Carré, and Maîtres Letemplier and Séjournant, Notaries, were visited by this lady, accompanied by her husband, who borrowed fourteen thousand *livres*. We may gather that a certain amount of this money was used to buy the powders and pigeons' hearts, which had certainly succeeded wonderfully for our customer of sorcerers was just then favoured by both King and Queen. It seemed as if they need no longer conceal anything, for Marie-Thérèse shut her eyes and refused to listen to the insinuations of the Court.

But at the very doors of the Palace the people were not merely insinuating—they were shouting insults. One day a woman who had lost her son, as the result of an accident at the works at Versailles, was heavily taxed by a Court of Justice. She awaited Louis in the passage and heaped insults upon him, calling him the "libertine, the intriguing King, the tyrant," and

¹ He took a carriage only across Paris.

so on. "The King could not believe his ears ; he asked if she was speaking to him, to which she replied that she was, and continued."

They seized the unfortunate creature, and threw her into the *Petites-Maisons*, having first had her whipped in public, "with extreme rigour, during which she did not utter a cry, suffering this cruelty as does a martyr, for the love of God." Shortly afterwards, in spite of this example, a man burst forth into similar speeches. He was condemned to the galleys, and to have his tongue cut out. Public opinion, whose tongue cannot be cut out, waxed indignant over these rigours, and protested against such arbitrary punishments.

So began the second phase of the passions of Louis XIV. The world had tolerated the love of a young prince for a mere child, who was without ambition, and whose wrong-doing could be almost pardoned on account of her charm and unselfishness ; but it was harder upon this adulterous passion, and upon a King of thirty, subjugated by a haughty Montespan.

At Court it was always understood that nothing was to be taken seriously, so they sang :

" On dit que La Vallière
S'en va sur son déclin ;
Ce n'est que par manière
Que le roi suit son train ;
Montespan prend sa place.
Il faut que tout y passe
Ainsi de main en main."

The songs, however, were only whispered, for the courtiers were as sweet to the Marquise as they had been treacherous to La Vallière. Mme de Montausier lowered herself to acting the go-between. We cannot even exempt her husband from blame ; he was brave and well-principled, but held that the King was outside all principles and laws. A deplorable weakness—and all the less pardonable because it was a way of currying favour.

Just then, all the greatest nobles were hoping for the post of Governor to the Dauphin. Public opinion pointed to the Maréchal de Bellefonds or the Duc de Navailles, who had behaved most nobly, as we know, where his wife was concerned, even to going against the King. Clever folk laid wagers upon the husband of Mme de Montausier, favourite of the favourites.

We come now to February, 1668, the time at which Lesage and Mariette were working in the Castle of Saint-Germain. It was just then that a serious thing happened, which for several months made the issue of these plots very uncertain. . . But the domain, for which Louise had never asked, was finally paid for. A decree of Parliament (February 22, 1668) authorised *dame* Louise-Françoise de La Baume Le Blanc, Duchesse de La Vallière, to put into the hands of Robert, principal clerk at the Record-Office, the sum of 248,000 *livres* in payment for her acquisition of the estates of Vaujours and Saint-Christophe. We must not fancy, however, that the Duchess was well-off even then. On the contrary, she was in such straitened circumstances that on January 1, 1668, the day of present-giving (this date is worth noticing) she had had to borrow 20,000 *livres* from a friar, Jean Pottier, who charged no interest. Louise promised to pay him back whenever he should ask for it, but, as she was still a minor, she pledged herself to settle the affair as soon as she was twenty-five, which would be on August 8, 1669; but the loan was not repaid until January 28, 1673—we know not precisely how, but at all events Jean Pottier was content.

CHAPTER III

FEBRUARY, 1668—FEBRUARY, 1669

ENCOURAGED by success and emboldened by impunity, the rascals of the Rue Beauregard and Rue de la Tannerie threw all moderation to the winds. Their *clientèle* was growing. They were working for Mme du Roure, for de Polignac—and *still*, against La Vallière! In March there were great ceremonies for Mme de Polignac, in the very chapel of Saint-Germain itself. Two pigeons' hearts had been buried at the Bois de Boulogne—one of the best-known incantations, supposed to produce immense effects in forty days at latest. The infallible hour was approaching, when a troublesome accident happened, which compromised the very sorcerers themselves. About June 29, Lesage and Mariette were arrested.¹ What can have been Mme de Montespan's emotions on hearing this news! On June 30, the examination of Mariette upon his relations with Voisin began. He was also examined on the point of the petitions passed under the chalice, and on certain "texts" pronounced over the head of a certain great lady. . . . One searching question, one slip from the witness—and the whole pack of cards would be about her ears! There was another worry

¹ "There is much talk here of a priest from Saint-Séverin whom they have in the Bastille. They say—but I don't believe it—that he's a wizard" (GUY-PATIN, *Lettres*, July 17, 1668, v. III. p. 283, 1707 edition). In his letter of the following 27th, Guy-Patin reaffirms his incredulity: "The Criminal Prosecutor is working at this business of the priest-wizard!"

as well. While she was speculating distractedly on these matters, the poor lady was forced to appear as serene and gay as ever, to laugh and amuse herself, with the Bastille and Châtelet cells for ever present to her mind's eye! For at this very moment the King, as compensation for a Carnival which had been cut short by his campaign in Franche-Comté, had resolved to give some great festivities at Versailles. They began on July 18. The Duchesse de La Vallière and her sister-in-law, the Marquise, sat at the Royal table. Mme de Montespan was relegated to that of the Queen's ladies, but the King's eyes were never off her face. The festivities lasted for a week. Molière—that too well-informed husband—like a sick man worrying at his wound, continued to divert the Court at the expense of his jealous fellow-sufferers. *Georges Dandin* followed *Amphitryon*, farce supplementing comedy. 'Tis said that the great man, having modelled one of his characters on a certain person, read the piece to the model, so as entirely to remove all suspicion—and that the audacious impertinence succeeded. Yet, daring as Molière was, he might well have been nervous if he had pondered on all the possible applications of his work. Athénais, certainly, could hardly have recognised herself, in her part of temptress to adultery, under the mask of Alcmena, that discreet lady whom a god led astray! But had she not practised all the artifices of the Sottenvilles' daughter when that young lady fled to meet Clitandre? Turn Georges Dandin, the peasant married to a country-squire's daughter, into a provincial nobleman, the unhappy husband of a Court-beauty—and you have M. de Montespan! According to Molière, *Georges Dandin* immensely amused the King and the courtiers. One can understand the King, but surely Montespan-Dandin, wild with jealousy, and Athénais-Angélique,

totally oblivious of his sufferings, must have listened in somewhat distracted fashion! Astonishingly cool-headed as the lady was, it must have been difficult to laugh while her imprisoned wizards were being examined by the magistrates.

And as misfortunes never come singly, M. de Montespan chose that moment to be particularly troublesome.

He was a highly intelligent man, but, in the opinion of those most thoroughly steeped in the Versailles atmosphere, "a very extravagant and eccentric kind of husband." Let us judge for ourselves. He "made a desperate fuss about the King's liking for his wife;" talked of it to all and sundry, and created endless scandal. Some caricatures are more like than portraits, and a pamphlet of the time invented a conversation between M. de Montespan and Lord Castlemaine, the husband of a lady whom Charles II. honoured with his "liking." The English peer is philosophic; but the Marquis is jealous, and, as Mlle de Montpensier said, "eccentric." There is no doubt that he made every imaginable effort to escape dishonour. His wife had offered to leave Court (some said), had even begged him to take her out of reach of temptation, by carrying her off to his castle in the Pyrenees. . . All this is in the highest degree improbable.¹ Montespan alone it was who had the courage, almost unique in those days, to dispute his wife with the King.

On a September day, in 1666, at Saint-Germain, he actually ventured to read Louis a homily, in which he brought forward several texts from Holy Writ—especially the case of David—to prove that the King

¹ SAINT-SIMON, notes on Dangeau (see *Mémoires de Dangeau*, v. XVI. p. 50). Saint-Simon says merely that Montespan, eagerly urged by his wife, refused, in his foolish confidence in her, to take her away.

must give up the Marquise or fear the judgment of God. "The harangue was admirable." That evening, in Paris, he told Mlle de Montpensier all about it. "I told him" (we quote her own words) "not to be a fool. These stories were too absurd, I said. No-one would believe that he had really said all that; they would put it down to the Archbishop of Sens, who was his uncle, and hostile to Mme de Montespan." This was a futile argument, for the Archbishop, despite a reputation for severity, had only one anxiety just then, and that was to show how absolutely neutral he was in the extraordinary affair. Montespan knew all this, and "went on talking." Mademoiselle saw that her arguments were unavailing, and as the victim was a sort of connection, and might compromise her as well as the Archbishop, she hurried off to Saint-Germain next day. There, drawing Mme de Montespan aside, she said: "I saw your husband at Paris. He is crazier than ever. I scolded him well, and told him that if he didn't hold his tongue, he would really have to be put in prison."

And the favourite answered with apparent composure, "He's here—setting the whole Court by the ears. I'm so ashamed, for he and my parrot seem to be considered equally amusing by the wretched creatures! He's telling the most awful stories, and bringing in Mme de Montausier's name."¹

But though Athénais took this disdainful attitude, things were turning into deadly earnest, and the "fuss" was growing into a scandal. Montespan, forgetful now of the effect, and eager only to divine the cause, accused the virtuous Mme de Montausier of

¹ Mlle DE MONTPENSIER, *Mémoires*, v. IV. p. 153. The two versions of these *Mémoires* should always be collated.

A portrait at the Cassel Museum represents the Marquise with her parrot (*De La Vallière à Montespan*).

being the source of his misfortune. But the incomparable Julie had done so well out of the little kindnesses of the sort which she had already rendered that she now entirely disdained such petty devices. Her husband had just been appointed Governor to the Dauphin—a post which he had obtained over the heads of M. de Navailles, husband of the stern Duchess, and M. de Bellefonds, the friend and adviser of the Duchesse de La Vallière. The Lady-of-Honour was overwhelmed with congratulations. But one fine day a man rushed in upon her, burst into recriminations, called her a go-between, and used other brutal words to characterise her behaviour with regard to his wife. It was that Montespan, being “eccentric” once more! There was a terrible fuss; somebody ran to tell the King, and hurried back again; but the mad Marquis had said his say, and had already disappeared. Mme de Montespan, being informed of it, went to her friend. Mme de Montausier was lying on her bed, so upset that she could not speak. But at last she was able to tell La Grande Mademoiselle, who had quickly rejoined the favourite, about the furious entrance of *le mari*, and his still more furious outbreak: “He said the most insulting things to me. I thanked God” (God must be thanked, though the heavens fall!) “that there were only women here; if there had been any men, he’d have been flung out of the window, I’m sure!”¹

On the whole the principal victim was Mme de Montausier. When she had recovered from the first shock, she said that the whole thing reminded one of the old conquerors and the slaves who followed their

¹ Compare the two editions of *Mademoiselle's Memoirs*. First edition: “There was a tremendous deal of gossip, but it was hushed up as much as possible.” Second edition: “There was a tremendous deal of gossip, because the outrage was really unbearable to a woman who had *hitherto* had a good reputation.”

cars, shouting abuse all the time. This pompous comparison, in the slightly faded taste of the Hôtel Rambouillet, did not silence criticism. One of her dear friends remarked—and was at once voted a wit—that the Marquis had strewed ashes on Mme de Montausier's head. Another friend, Mme de Longueville, felt her devotional calm sway before the wind of these adventures. She wrote to the Duchess, in a condoling manner, "three lines of balderdash"; and to Mme de Sablé, in very trenchant style, a cruel analysis of the situation: "Of all the accidents which can happen to an old Lady-of-Honour, that is the most humiliating."¹

The lady was not so old as her friend was kind enough to hint; but this mortification aged her sadly. It is impossible to pity her. She was expiating a double wrong. What she had done to injure Montespan was assuredly the lesser one: it did not exceed the limits of a somewhat disgraceful complaisance. The greater was that of which she had been guilty towards two defenceless Queens, in their own Palace, when she had obliged them to receive Louise de La Vallière at Vincennes.

Montausier took his wife's adventures quite philosophically. He had come back from his province

¹ The letter has been published by COUSIN, *Madame de Sablé*, p. 410: "What do you think of the Dauphin's new Governor? and what do you say to the mortification which spoilt the rejoicings over it all—I mean the affair with M. de Montespan? Have you congratulated Mme de Montausier? My own inclination was to hold my tongue, for I thought one had better not say anything which might remind her of such a horrid business. But some one told me that she might be offended by my silence; so I wrote her three lines of balderdash." Mayolais, one of Loret's successors, had a charming couplet about it:

"Il court un bruit que je tiens singulier,
Que l'on fait changer à Dame Montausier,
Qui n'en sçaura la cause en d'autres termes l'apreine:
Des affaires des Grands je n'empeste ma veine."

Sept. 20, 1669, v. III, p. 933.

in Normandy, where the pestilence was then raging, and the King had sent him into a sort of quarantine at Rambouillet. No one told him about the scene when he arrived at Court, and "he pretended to know nothing of it." Louis, who must have known all, had Montespan arrested, but all sorts of pretexts were invented to save every one's face. Guy-Patin, writing to one of his correspondents, said: "This morning (September 22) M. de Montespan, son-in-law of M. de Mortemart, was by order of the King imprisoned in For-l'Evêque, for having criticised unfavourably the King's selection of M. de Montausier." For, after all, it *was* difficult to incriminate the favourite's husband! Louis almost immediately permitted him to be released; but, at the same time, he thought it well to take the Court to some less accessible place than Saint-Germain, so on September 22 they left for Chambord.

The Castle of Chambord is now considered one of our finest specimens of Renaissance architecture. In it, grandiosity is allied to grace, the most delicate ornaments being supported by a thoroughly solid structure. But the men of the seventeenth century, indifferent to the beauties which delight us nowadays, saw it merely as a very old Palace, well-built despite its antiquity, situated in a good hunting-country—and "big enough to house all the European Royalties." There was a further advantage: no large town was near, not even a village—tiresome and "eccentric" folk could not suddenly descend upon one. The immense park was entirely enclosed, and very easy to guard. In short, if the King was at home everywhere, *here* one was "at home" with the King, and no one could come in without his express permission. To one of the guests invited—or rather, ordered—there, namely, to Louise de La Vallière, Chambord

had the charm of looking out on the banks of the Loire. From her windows she could see Blois, and that other Palace which had sheltered her as a child. She had left it an ignorant girl, infinitely curious about life, obscure, almost a nobody ; she saw it now as an experienced and disillusioned woman, a Duchess without a Duke, a married woman without a husband, a mother without children. On the glass of a window at Chambord a former King—who had no right to make the quip !—had written the well-known couplet :

"Souvent femme varie,
Mal habil qui s'y fie."

It is said that one day La Vallière silently pointed it out to Louis XIV.—a delicate allusion to the inconstancy of the King, a dumb reproach, characteristic of the woman who never "varied," except to grow better. Louis understood, and had the motto erased or the pane removed—for the epigram in this case was too ironical. Then he went on varying.¹

The distich of Francis I. had been replaced, in Court quotation, by the latest fashionable couplet :

"On dit que La Vallière
S'en va sur son déclin,
Montespan prend sa place ;
Il faut que tout y passe
Ainsi de main en main."

"Montespan takes her place !" Any profound observer would have chosen La Vallière's "decline" rather than her rival's success. . . The Marquise had had to leave Paris on September 24, when Mariette and Lesage were in prison. The audacious rascals had appealed to Parliament against their first sentence, and were to be examined again on September 26.

¹ If we believe the tradition, it must have been in the year 1668 that the little scene took place. Two years later, on the second visit, the reproach would have lost much of its delicacy.

Every turn of the Royal carriage-wheels took her farther away—and distance and anxiety make a bad pair. *What would happen?* But the Montespan's foul accomplices were quite as tenacious of their squalid existences as she was of her splendours. Voisin loved Lesage, who loved her in return. The wizard had even begun a sort of *envoûtement* of her husband—and these gentry, when they were working for themselves, got quite certain results from their magic. In a word, the woman, either from love or fear, used her influence. She knew many people, even in the magistracy.¹ Mariette was related to the wife of the Judge who heard his case. . . . Our villains made evasive replies. They pretended that they had never heard Mme de Montespan's name, and President de Mesme hushed up the affair. Lesage, under the name of Dubuisson, went to the galleys, calmly enough, lest a worse fate befall him. The authorities contented themselves with banishing the priest Mariette. But sentence was not pronounced until the early days of October, so the torture of the question lasted three months for Mme de Montespan. There were compensations, though. The magicians might be having a disagreeable quarter of an hour—but their magic was triumphantly successful. The favourite knew that a fresh bond, a living bond, was about to rivet the King's affection for her.

Sweet and gentle as La Vallière was, it was impossible, after the scandal at Saint-Germain, that she should be satisfied with a silent protest. Her love was too profound to accept defeat so easily. She tried to fight for her own hand ; but we have only scanty

¹ Lesage, in one of his depositions, gave some curious details of Voisin's relations with legal and police circles. La Boutier says that Voisin "had an immense number of acquaintances of every sort and kind" (*Archives de la Bastille*, v. IV. p. 41).

information about this critical period. La Vallière, characteristically, says nothing of it; and the King, as one might suppose, omits any mention from his *Mémoires*. There is little or no correspondence on the subject. Bussy-Rabutin was paying his attentions to Mme de Montespan¹; Mme de Sévigné kept all her smiles for the new favourite. Nothing succeeds like success. Only one anonymous contemporary writer has given us a well-imagined account of the scene.

La Vallière "gently complained to the King. He told her coldly that he was too sincere to deceive her any longer; that it was true he loved Mme de Montespan; but that, nevertheless, he had not ceased to feel for herself a very sincere affection; that he was doing things for her with which she had every reason to be satisfied—that, indeed, he did not think she *could* desire more, and that she was too intelligent not to be aware that a King of his type did not like to be under any kind of constraint. . . So hard and cold a reply, and so definitely authoritative a manner, over-

¹ Letter of August 1, 1669, *Correspondance de Roger de Rabutin*, v. I. p. 191. We know not why doubts have been cast upon the authenticity of the following letter from La Vallière, in which she describes, so forcibly and sincerely, her state of mind: "Ah, my father, do not forbid me the hair-shirt—so small a thing as it is! It mortifies my sinful flesh, but it cannot touch my far more sinful soul. Not the hair-shirt it is which wears me down, which robs me of sleep and rest, but my undying remorse, and the weak longing I feel to give myself reason for still more repentance. For do I not see them every day? Do not my eyes watch their eyes? Am I not seated by *her* side, while he is on the other—but so far from me! Do I not hear and see? Oh, my father! may God forgive me if I blaspheme—but though I am not acquainted with hell, I can imagine none more terrible than that in which my heart now abides, and desires, alas! to abide—for not to see *him* would be a worse torment, and one which I cannot face." (Fragment of a letter quoted in the *Mémoires de la baronne d'Oberkirck*, v. II. p. 223, and reproduced in the sequel to the *Réflexions sur la miséricorde de Dieu*, by the Duchesse de La Vallière. New edition, revised, annotated, and prefaced by a biographical study, by Père CLÉMENT, of the Institute.)

whelmed Mme de La Vallière entirely. She wept, she pleaded. . . Nothing could move the King. His mind was made up, and he interrupted her to say curtly that if she wished to retain his affection she must ask nothing from him that he did not give of his own free will ; that his desire, moreover, was that she should continue to live with Mme de Montespan as she had hitherto done ; and he ended by threatening to take other steps if she showed any hostility towards that lady.

“ Mme de La Vallière, who is the sweetest woman imaginable, obeyed, regarding the King’s will as law. She lived with Mme de Montespan like anything rather than a rival. And as nobody had any doubt at all that the King was thoroughly weary of La Vallière, and that his one idea was to break entirely with her and devote himself to Mme de Montespan, they all admired her gentleness and submission.

“ Mme de La Vallière, however, resolved to make one last effort, for either she still preserved one gleam of hope, or else she hoped to cheat her grief by expressing it—at any rate, she sent this sonnet to the King :

‘ Tout se détruit, tout passe, et le cœur le plus tendre
Ne peut du même objet se contenter toujours ;
Le passé n’a point eu d’éternelles amours,
Et les siècles suivants n’en doivent point entendre.
La constance a des lois qu’on ne veut point attendre ;
Des désirs d’un grand roi rien n’arrête le cours ;
Ce qui plaît aujourd’huy déplaît en peu de jours ;
Cette inégalité ne sauroit se comprendre.
Tous ces défauts, grand roi, font tort à vos vertus ;
Vous m’aimiez autrefois, mais vous ne m’aimez plus.
Mes sentiments, hélas ! diffèrent bien des vôtres !
Amour, à qui je dois et mon mal et mon bien,
Que ne luy donniez-vous un cœur comme le mien,
Ou que n’avez-vous fait le mien comme les autres.’

“ This sonnet was considered very good. The King praised it publicly—and that was enough to ensure general admiration. But it made no difference in the

private affairs of its author ; all that Mme de La Vallière gained by it were fresh assurances that he would always feel the deepest esteem for her."

A pity that we do not know the name of the poet who was kind enough to give La Vallière the graceful support of his Muse ! For Racine, La Fontaine, Molière, kept all their flatteries for the haughty Montespan. It cannot possibly have been Benserade. Well, whoever it was, the delicate, felicitous sonnet will remain, in some sort, the swan-song of that true and disinterested passion. Before long the forsaken woman herself will be found thanking God for having refused her that perfect satisfaction in human love which might have filled her heart to the exclusion of His grace—for having, on the contrary, caused her to experience extreme ingratitude and very profound disappointment.

Why did she stay, then ? Why did she endure life in common with a rival who obliged her to deck that rival's charms with her own hands ? The most sympathetic biographers of Louise de La Vallière have severely censured her for this attitude towards Mme de Montespan. But is it so difficult to divine the reason for it ? Her excuse is written in the Letters-Patent of May, 1667.

The King held her by a chain stronger than a woman's passion for a man—namely, by the love of a mother for her son. The little boy, born at Saint-Germain in 1667, was not recognised until February, 1669—and then with evident reluctance.¹ No provision for his future was made until the end of the year, when the King decided to confer upon him the post of Admiral of France, left vacant by the presumed death of M. de Beaufort. It was a remarkably clever way

¹ The Letters of Legitimation for the Comte de Vermandois have not hitherto been published. They are dated Feb. 20, 1669.

of refusing it to every one else! Previously, there was promulgated a *Mémoire pour sçavoir quel nom il est besoin de donner à M. le comte de Vermandois, amiral de France*. "These" (says the author, probably the learned Baluze) "are the different styles under which he may be known: Louis, Bastard of Bourbon, Comte de Vermandois, Admiral of France? Louis, Bastard of France, Admiral of France? Louis the Bastard, Comte de Vermandois? Louis, legitimated of France? Louis, natural son of the King? Or merely Louis, Comte de Vermandois, Admiral of France?"

The last formula was the one adopted. Some said it was an improvement, since bastardy was no longer officially proclaimed. Others thought it a mistake, since it seemed to make no distinction between bastardy and legitimacy. The real reason for it was that the King already had another child who could not even be declared a bastard.¹ The post of Admiral, given to the baby-Louis, brought no pecuniary advantage to his mother. Mme de La Vallière's good fortune continued to be more apparent than actual. Vaujours brought in little; most of the inhabitants were very poor, and its Duchess had a tender heart. Far from oppressing her vassals, she would often intercede for them herself. Moreover, the property was to go to her daughter to the exclusion of her son. To this intolerable situation Louise submitted for two long years—and that was her motive in doing so. . . But why was she retained at Court?

A very expert observer of such matters, Bussy-Rabutin, points out convincingly the King's motive: "He needed a pretext for Mme de Montespan." All is said.

People who prate of absolute power have no idea

¹ COLBERT, *Lettres, Instructions, Mémoires*, v. VI, p. 272. M. Clément dates this document December, 1669—a manifest error, since it is anterior to November 12,

of the amount of bother which a recalcitrant husband managed to give the greatest King in the world. As far as a mere mortal may, the Marquis had refused to "share" with Jupiter. He was an odd man, if you will, "but he had plenty of wit," and he devised a most original revenge. The poet had given the innocent Alcmena a double Amphitryon; the Marquis, on the contrary, made two wives out of one. He yielded to the King the adulterous one, for he had not been able to keep her; the other—the Marquise—he buried in effigy. By his orders, the obsequies of Mme de Montespan were pompously celebrated; he officially announced her death; he wore mourning for her. It was a somewhat too-lugubriously facetious way of submitting to *force majeure*, and was not reassuring either to the King or to his mistress. Montespan's name was mentioned as seldom as possible.¹ A demand for separation from the outraged husband was attempted, wherein, by an audacious reversal of the parts, *he* was accused of injuries, cruelty, the dissipation of a fortune which he had never had; but, powerful as was the complainant's protector, Royal justice lent a deaf ear, and the affair died a natural death. To avoid a greater scandal, Louise remained the official Royal mistress, and when the King went to Mme de Montespan, he went by way of Mme de La Vallière's room. The Court soon found the right witticism for this situation. It was said that Louis was going "to *the Ladies*." It *was* one or the other of them—the Ladies, in fact! Remarkably ingenious!

But ingenious as it was, it was not enough. Towards

¹ In *L'Etat de la France pour 1669*, p. 69, the daughters of M. de Mortemart are enumerated, and Françoise de Rochechouart is cited, with no allusion to Montespan. Nevertheless, in the part relating to the Queen's Household, Mme de Montespan had to appear under her legal name.

the month of March, 1669, Mme de Montespan had brought into the world a doubly adulterous son. Louis then at last realised to what depths he had descended in guilty love-affairs. When, some time ago, he had sent Colbert to take away La Vallière's children under cover of the night, his only cares had been for the reputation of his mistress and the preservation of a decent reserve towards the two Queens. Later on he had permitted, or rather ordered, Louise's confinements to take place at Vincennes or Saint-Germain. Such conduct was reprehensible, but at least it proved that no apprehension was felt as to the safety of the children. Marie-Thérèse, for all her jealousy, would have revenged herself only by lavishing maternal care upon the poor babies. But what might not an irate Marquis do? The very thought was unnerving!

Mme de La Vallière was forced to cover the relations of the King and the Marquise by her presence at Court. But more could not be demanded of her—they could not expect her to have the children of her rival housed with her own. The ex-demoiselle de Pons, now Mme de Heudicourt—she whom we encountered during the early days of the Montespan¹ affair—offered her services. But Louis, though he might make use of this type of person, thoroughly despised and distrusted it. His mistress knew by experience that it is sometimes dangerous to show off one's friends, so with one mind they wanted to discover somebody

¹ This Mme de Heudicourt had, later on, a somewhat troublesome adventure, in which her tendency towards the improper was fully revealed. Upon the point which now occupies our attention, hear Mme de Maintenon: "Mme de Heudicourt was in their confidence—and nothing on earth would have induced *me* to be in it to the extent *she* was" (Mme DE MAINTENON, *Lettres historiques et édifiantes*, v. II. p. 461). As Mme de Maintenon undertook to bring up the children born to the King and Mme de Montespan, one can only conclude that her friend was a degree worse—namely, a go-between all along.

less compromised and more trustworthy. The sequel will show whether Athénaïs, in her cleverness, was to be any more fortunate than La Vallière had been in her trustfulness.

Mme de Heudicourt knew a woman approaching the thirties, much gifted by nature, much tormented by fortune, living on a tiny Court-pension ; of good enough origin, but somewhat reduced in social status by her marriage with "a sort of a man of letters," as they said at that time. Her name was Françoise d'Aubigné, or the widowed Madame Scarron. She was known to be indefatigably diligent, and (according to herself) entirely trustworthy, discreet, and "safe." She was needy, too, and burdened by an extravagant, pretentious, and incapable brother ; and, in La Vallière's day of glory, she had approached that lady with a petition—but without neglecting, either, the Marquise de Montespan, whom she often saw at the Hôtel d'Albret. In a word, she was a most masterly woman ! And it was proposed to Madame Scarron that she should bring up secretly the adulterous children.

If we believe what she said in after years, the prudent lady, far from jumping at the proposal of "this somewhat peculiar honour,"¹ refused it, "saying that it did not suit her to bring up Mme de Montespan's children ; if they were the King's, and *he* desired it, he might surely have asked her himself." The King (if, again, we believe her version) did ask her, and it was not till then "that she took them to her house." But the truth is, whatever she may say, that in 1669 this stage of negotiations—as if from one great power to another—was far from having been reached. Much more probably, our cautious friend made certain that the King believed the coming infant to be his offspring, and also that he urgently required the secret of its

¹ The phrase is her own—but when was it written ?

birth to be zealously guarded.¹ Mme Scarron, who entered upon her functions about March, 1669, went and shut herself up at the end of the Rue Vaugirard—very resolute to answer no intrusive questions. And indeed it *was* a “peculiar honour” for a young widow, much courted by dashing men, to be given the charge of a new-born child, which she was to bring up as a mother and without one word of explanation, in a big house, surrounded by a big garden, with numerous servants, horses, carriages, at her disposal! The very entrance to the mysterious abode was forbidden to even intimate friends, even if those friends were women.² Who then, did enter? Undoubtedly, as the saying goes, this young widow was “unconventional.”

If she *had* felt any scruples, certain aristocratic examples would have shown her how superfluous such things were.

At the beginning of the same year, M. de Mortemart, Mme de Montespan's father, had sold his post as First Gentleman of the Chamber for 800,000 *livres*, of which he used 400,000 “to pay his debts,” and 400,000 to buy for M. de Vivonne, his son, the Generalship of the Galleys. In addition, a quite gratuitous compensation was granted him—that of the Governorship of Paris. Hostile opinion, on the other hand, attributed a horrible remark to M. de Montespan's father. Some one spoke to him of his daughter-in-law's success with the man who was *not* his son, and he was reported to have said, “Thank Heaven, some good luck has come our way at last!” But indeed the good Papa

¹ This point is put beyond all doubt by the *Mémoires* of a *dame* de Saint-Louis: “There is no certain date for the King's commission to take care of Mme de Montespan's children; but it was done to hide the birth of *the first*” (MAINTENON, *Correspondance générale*, v. I. p. 144; *Mémoires de La Fare*, p. 229).

² M. Lemoine has discovered the exact situation of the house, and will ere long satisfy the curious on this interesting point.

might well have anticipated the same accident, with very much less of solid profit attached to it !

And so at last everything was arranged to suit the King's pleasure. Louis now had all his replies ready. "Where was he going?" To the Ladies. "Whence came this new-born child?" From the Ladies. . . For, in fact, Louise and Mme de Montespan occupied the same room. This has long been regarded as a mere caprice of the King, but in reality it was all compact of calculation and fear, while in La Vallière's conduct—generally classed as weak and cowardly—all was submission and maternal self-sacrifice.

In truth, ever since the beginning of 1669, Louise had been living the strange life which she detested, yet accepted silently. The care of a Paris notary, Maître Pérard, whose literary culture was as deep as his legal knowledge, has preserved for us a very curious relic of this voluntary servitude :

" *The first of February, 1669.*

"In the presence of Jean Marot, Architect to the King, dwelling in the Faubourg Saint-Germain des Prez, rue Guisard (*sic*), who has agreed, promised, and promises by these presents to Mesdames la Duchesse de La Vallière and Marquise de Montespan, dwelling in the Pavilion of the Castle of the Thuilleries, to make and complete well and duly as it behoves him four grottoes, that is, two for the said lady, Duchesse de La Vallière and two for Mme de Montespan, the whole in the abode at their Chateau Viel of Saint-Germain en Laye. The arrangement made on condition of the sum of four thousand *livres* . . . the said *sieur* Marot acknowledges having received from the said ladies the sum of three hundred and thirty-three *livres*, six *sols*, eight *deniers*, each her half, for which receipt . . . etc. At the said Pavilion of the said

Was it a mere chance? or the effect of fixed habits of mind? For the two signatures are wonderfully characteristic of the two writers. Athénaïs de Rochechouart takes her full title—*la Marquise de Montespan*; the Duchesse de Vaujours signs her name merely—*Louise de La Vallière*. Again we retrieve our little violet, shy of being a Duchess! And it is evident that she only joined in the arrangement to make Madame de Montespan's action valid—for that lady was under her husband's coverture.¹

While this moral immolation was going on, many songs were composed to an air taken from one of the Versailles ballets—those songs which were called *contre-vérités*. One among them said, speaking of M. le Grand (the Grand Equerry, Louis d'Armagnac), who had a reputation for excessive naïveté :

"Pour Monsieur le Grand
Il est tout mystère
Quand il est galant.
Il a comme La Vallière
L'esprit pénétrant."

Who wrote this song, with its allusion to Louise? Who but the woman who had tried, but failed, to poison her—the Viper of the Mazarines—Olympe de Soissons!

¹ G. GUIFFREY, *Comptes de la maison du roi*, v. I. pp. 344, 349. I have, with some trouble, reconstructed the plan of this little abode at Saint-Germain, where the King had a secret entrance, by a staircase of which he alone had the key. It was situated on the east, looking out on the Pavillon Henri-Quatre.

CHAPTER IV

1669

IN 1669, after eight years of a life which, if she had read it in a novel, would have appeared to her over-drawn, Mme de La Vallière was only approaching her twenty-fifth year. A more ambitious woman would have lost her head now, whether she looked forward or backward—whether she considered her past obscurity and her present rank, or her past happiness and her present abandonment. But Louise's exquisite nature, which had kept her humble in prosperity, kept her courageous in adversity. Nevertheless, now that the great days were over (the days which she had told herself were never to be over !) it was difficult for her to resume the path of duty once more—difficult at first, at any rate. Her family encouraged her to remain at Court. And she—fastidious, beauty-loving—had grown accustomed to sumptuous surroundings. In a word, she was a woman—and one whose pride had been wounded ; she was a Duchess, and the mother of two legitimated Royal children. Disillusion upon disillusion still awaited her ere she could perceive the truth. She set her heart upon gaining, by her own merit alone, those worldly successes and distinctions, that homage which was to vanish with the Sovereign's favour ! And to this end she grasped at all her ducal privileges, she spent carelessly all the money which Colbert—assuredly *not* carelessly !—

supplied for her frequent demands. She loved fine jewels, and bought some of those which the Duchesse de Mazarin had left behind in her flight. But her extravagances were always in good taste, as we can judge by the following detail. She possessed at Carrières, on the banks of the Seine, a beautifully arranged bathing-pavilion, with little rustic rooms, a table and seats made out of the grass-banks. And, after the bath, she and her friends would feast on cream and stale bread, just as the peasants in the neighbouring hut might be doing !

Then she took up another caprice. Her troubled mind had feeble impulses towards study, pretensions to philosophic knowledge, to religious controversy. Sincere as Louise's passion was, it had had, none the less, its natural effect—sin, in orthodox language, had obscured her faith . . . and a kind of "natural religion" was having its turn everywhere in the national mind ; kindly professors of the teaching of Gassendi were often substituted for a stern confessor. It was at this time that Madame Henriette herself declared that she felt she must seriously try to discover the *true* religion. Louise de La Vallière was affected by the wave of thought. She was naturally fond of learning new things. She had first read novels, then history ; now she took up the study—if one can so describe these feminine caprices—of the theories of Aristotle and Descartes. If we believe her, she did in the end become saturated with these philosophies. . . But we do *not* believe her !

At a time not precisely fixed for us, but certainly before May, 1670, Louise de La Vallière fell seriously ill. The nature of her malady we do not know. She seems to have attributed it to some contagion. Her

friend, Mme de Montespan, *her* dear friend, Mme du Roure, and several other customers of the Voisin woman, may possibly have had some more definite idea of the cause.

In a few days, almost suddenly, Louise went from health to illness, from illness to danger of death. In that supreme hour when the dying see their whole past lives in a flash of insight, this woman of twenty-five suddenly perceived herself as a heap of infamy, "unshriven, unannealed," and shrinking in the very shadow of death. "Like a poor criminal on the scaffold, she was impatient that all the gruesome preliminaries should be over." Everyone thought it was the last agony. She said herself: "The priests on one side of me, and the doctors on the other, seemed as doubtful about my soul's recovery as about my body's . . . and I, like some poor animal, could do nothing to help myself." Then, from the very depths of her heart, she implored Heaven's pity, and Heaven's pity descended upon her. The young woman—the young mother!—felt that exquisite sensation, sweet to all living things, and especially to young things, of a joyous rebound towards healthful life.

And, health restored, the malady shaken off as suddenly as it had fastened upon her,¹ Louise resolved to offer all to God. An indulgent confessor was ready to admit her to Communion, but her delicate soul, with some return of its youthful piety, could feel nothing but its own unworthiness. The favourite, the King's mistress, the dear woman whom nobody had ever dared to malign, now maligned herself. She sent away the "weak, time-serving, and prevaricating confessor, who thought more of pleasing than of saving her"; she refused that too-facile absolution which could have

¹ In three days La Vallière was much better, and could write her *Reflexions*.

given her only a deceptive tranquillity. "How, O Lord, can I offer you a pure and acceptable sacrifice when my mind is still full of the vanities of this world, and my heart is still instinct with its passion? How can I, without profaning you, invite you to share a heart which, but an hour ago, was possessed by your dearest foes?"

"Give me that contrite and broken heart which you will never despise; O Lord, of your holy grace inspire me with the feelings of that poor woman of Canaan who came and prostrated herself at your feet.

"Regard me as you regarded that humble stranger—like a poor dog that thinks itself happy to pick up the crumbs which fall from the table of your elect.

"Look with pity on this poor sinner, who, still burning with the flame of her desires, asks you, like the woman of Samaria, for a drop of that living water which will slake her thirst, and make her no more long for sinful things.

"But, above all, look upon me always as you looked on Magdalen; let me, like that holy and repentant saint, water your feet with my tears—that, in trying to love you much, I may try also to efface the multitude of my offences."

Does the reader remember the confession of Mme de Longueville, made in 1661, when Louise was returning to Paris after her first visit to Fontainebleau? We retrieve the same penitent cries which escaped from the lips of the great Condé's proud and fiery-souled sister, upon the lips of the meek La Vallière. Only God can tell the heart; but, to human perception, Louise's penitence is, if not more sincere, at any rate much more simple. Mme de Longueville dissects herself, analysés her scruples, accuses herself of not

accusing herself enough or else too much, of not humbling herself enough or else of too greatly humbling herself for pure joy in doing so.

Louise nearly always expresses herself with perfect spontaneity. She has escaped from imminent death, but she is still prone in the bed which had begun to seem like her coffin—and she writes down with her own hand the *list of God's mercies* towards her.

Her reflections are easily summed up. She asks for a firm and lively faith, a faith which shall prove itself by its works.

She asks for the gift of charity. "May such charity as I implore you to have towards me be always the measure of my own towards my neighbours; may I love their souls more than my own life!"

She prays to God for greater fervour in prayer. Then her mind fastens on that death which has let her go this time, but which will take her quite away some future day.

"Ah! Lord, thou who never performest a miracle without some purpose, is it not to work out thy gracious ends in my soul that thou hast restored me to life!"

"Yea, Lord, I behold thy grace in thy very justice. I feel thy watchful eye upon my soul, even in all the accidents of my life.

"For this is why thou hast afflicted me, why thou troublest me now, and changest all my desires and all my feelings, so that hardly can I recognise myself in myself.

"And this is why, after having sworn to serve thee and love thee, to die a thousand deaths rather than fall back into my former errors, I write this paper with my own hand, as a register of thy mercies, of my most secret and profound resolves, and of all thy adorable realities;

“In order that, if ever I shall forget myself, I may find myself again in this sketch which, in thy gracious mercy, thou permittest me to make of what I wish to be ;

“In order that, when the vain pomps of this world shall whisper to me of those foolish hopes which have so often deceived me, I may repulse them in the full consciousness of their real value—that is, regarding them as I regard them now, and as I shall certainly regard them in the hour of my death.

“In order that if I ever do come to forget that moment of my agony and thy justice, when, like a poor criminal on the scaffold, I longed for all to end at once—I may remember it again by reading this paper in that same bed where the doctors on one side and the priests on the other seemed as doubtful about my soul’s recovery as about my body’s . . . and I, like some poor animal, could do nothing to help myself.

“Yes, Lord, I write with my own hand this short record of thy mercies and of the justice of thy judgments upon all sinners, in order that I may read in it for ever my sentence of eternal reprobation if I should abuse thy goodness to me ; and the certitude of my salvation and the eternal joy of thy presence if I am faithful to thee now. . .

“O God of my salvation, you who hold my soul and my hope of eternity in your hands ; you who have come to save me from the dust of the tomb, you who crown me with mercies, and fill my soul with holy longings, renewing its strength like an eagle’s ;

“O you, my God ! who in the greatness of my crime find the measure of your mercies, and who alone can convert sinners—convert *my* heart ;

“Because my soul is humbled, and the grievousness

of having displeased you stabs me with fear and pain ;

“ Because my soul has put all its trust in you, and knows nothing henceforth here below but yearning for your dear presence—for all this, O Lord, have pity on me, for I am poor and miserable, and you are infinitely rich and merciful.”

It has been thought that these reflections dated only from a few months before Louise's admission to the Carmelite Convent. That is a mistake. If, in her convalescence, she thought at all of those pious, secluded women, it was but as a contrast to herself, “ a poor creature still earth-bound.” The whole work proves that when she was writing it, Louise had never thought of any such retreat. On the contrary: “ It will be in a circle which cares only for its own interests that I shall henceforth affirm that you are my God, the sole and only adorable one. . . I shall tell them that my fortune is in your hands, and that, when you have finished the work of converting me, I shall be prouder than if I had conquered the whole world. O my God ! create in me a new heart . . . a truly Christian heart, which will make me love you when I shall have to risk my fortune and my life in the confession of your name, and render homage to that Divine Madness of the Cross, in the midst of a country and a nation which regard it as a scandal.”

It is still a woman of the world who speaks there ! She insists that she has sinned “ by the vivacity of her mind.” Witty sayings “ which prick and wound one's neighbours, delicate detractions which, under the mask of raillery, define faults and make them indelibly ridiculous—” these are the “ darling sins ” of which this inoffensive woman accuses herself. This La Vallière, so discreet and so modest, who never asked for anything for herself or for her people, who

blushed to be a Duchess, says again : " Let me not imagine that I am devoid of pride and self-conceit simply because I despise the world, and wish to owe to my own merit alone the distinctions which fortune refuses me."

Other passages, less feverish and more truly Christian, equally demonstrate that, at this epoch of her life, Louise thought herself called upon to remain at Court :

" If, to impose upon me a penitence in some sort commensurable with my offences, you demand that my ineludible duty should be to remain in the world, and suffer there on the very scaffold where I have so deeply angered you, if you wish to make my sin its own punishment by turning into my heart's torturers those who have been its idols, then *Paratum cor meum, Deus ! paratum cor meum !* But stay by me therein, and cause my anguish to keep me from being poisoned by the contagious air of every day.

" Yea, Lord, however I may be obliged to consort with the professional libertines who can do nothing to us but breathe irreligion into our souls, tarnish the most spotless reputation, and give us a presumptuous opinion of ourselves . . . however great may be the disgust I feel for their minds and persons, I shall be faithful, O my God ! I shall guard myself as closely as I may from intercourse and friendship with them. For is it not the least that I can render unto you for having so loved me, to hate the company of those who do not love you ?

" Lord, who can do as you will with the hearts of men, change all my friendships. . . For you know, Lord, how easily I am impressed by what I see, with how much facility I do good with the good, and evil with the evil.

" For, alas ! I am so weak and so vacillating that

my best desires are like that flower of the field which your Prophet-King describes—saying that it flowers in the morning and in the evening is withered.

“Be not content with having taught me to detest this world, since I avoid it rather from pride and reason than from the pure impulse of your heavenly grace. Preserve me from the sweet poison of success in this world, which might make me love it.”

One passage from her *Réflexions* suffices to prove that Louise had suffered this remorseful reaction long before her retreat to the Carmelites—in fact shortly after the King's desertion of her :

“Permit me not, my God, to be sure of myself merely because I am disgusted with my sin, while all the time I am cherishing still the exquisite memory of my passion ;

“Let me not delude myself into believing that I no longer love the object, because I now look only for harmless joys from his friendship ;

“Nor imagine that I have died to my passion, yet all the while feel it more profoundly than ever for the being whom I love more than myself—and the more dangerously because my friendship, while seeking to justify me, prevents me from listening to my reason, and following the holy inspiration of your grace.”

Whom does she love more than herself? For whom does her passion continually revive? It is Louis whom she still loves—Louis, who is wild with desire for the Montespan. That “friendship” for which she blames herself is—O mystery of the heart of woman!—the friendship which her excess of gentleness puts at the service of her rival and her unfaithful lover.

Very probably these *Réflexions*, which were written in the course of a few days, afterwards underwent

many alterations and additions, but one feels that the original features have not been overlaid, and that they faithfully portray La Vallière's state of mind and soul at the time when, to adopt her own phrase, "God showed her her sin."

She was inexperienced in such mental states, and, in her rashness, she thought it right to try to expiate her error in the very place of its commission. That was a presumptuous and overstrained attitude—presumptuous, because it is not given to us to choose our own mode of expiation. Louise, her pride not yet entirely humbled, aspired to undergo her punishment "on the scaffold of the Court." But Heaven, sterner in one way, kinder in another, had already decided that she should have for her place of repentance a mere convent-cell.

We have a valuable piece of testimony as to this new and critical phase of Louise de La Vallière's life. The Princess Palatine, Monsieur's second wife, asked her the very question which, even still, the finer spirits ask themselves as they read her story. "I was curious," says the Princess, "to know why she had remained so long at Court as a sort of attendant, so to speak, upon the Montespan. She told me that God had touched her heart, had shown her her sin, and that then she had thought she must do penance and suffer in the way which hurt her most—and *that* was, to watch the King's heart turn away from her, and disdain take the place in it which love once had filled. In the three years after her love-affair with the King, she had suffered like one of the damned, and she had offered up all her anguish to God in expiation of her past sins ; for, since her sins had been public, her penance must be public too. They thought her an unobservant fool at the very time when she was suffering the most terribly ; and she went on suffering until

God had turned her heart to serve Him alone, which she thenceforth did."

These *three years after her love-affair with the King* were evidently reckoned by La Vallière from 1670 onwards. Did she forget, then, the three which had begun in 1667, at latest? Analysts of the human heart can now in some sort understand that of the unhappy woman who was taken for a fool, while she was suffering "like one of the damned."

CHAPTER V

JANUARY, 1670—DECEMBER, 1670

IF the forsaken Louise de La Vallière had any illusion of pleasing the world by her nobility, or the Court by her example of a Christian life, it was destined to be quickly dispelled. The world dismissed her in the twinkling of an eye. All the homage and all the solicitations were for Mme de Montespan, and that clever lady did not ward them off, as her reserved rival had been wont to do. Louise was similarly disillusioned as regards the effect of example. Far from admiring her disinterestedness, the sceptical Court pretended to believe that she was aiming at a fine establishment, after the manner of Royal favourites. Names of future husbands were quoted, among them that of Lauzun, the most unlikely of all.

It was only at the time of Louise's disenchantment—certainly a little late in life—that the need to love and to be loved seized upon Mademoiselle de Montpensier, that ambitious Princess who, in 1661, when she was giving children's dances to her young sisters and to *la petite* La Vallière, was already called La Grande Mademoiselle. She had spent fifteen years of her life in provoking, in repulsing, and in regretting innumerable Royal and Princely offers of marriage. The King of England was not sufficiently firm upon his throne; the King of Portugal was not nearly courteous enough; the Duke of Lorraine

had let the ramparts of his capital so utterly fall into ruin that he was no longer marriageable at all—and then, all of a sudden, the unfortunate lady felt an ardent desire for marriage. She reasoned with herself about it (for she mentioned it to no one), and said, “It is no longer a vague feeling—I feel I must love some one.” But she could not find out who it was. She searched, dreamed, but still could not find out, until at last, after all this restlessness, she realised that the invader of her heart was M. de Lauzun.

We have already met Lauzun, the lover of Mme de Monaco and many others, the man who had crushed his mistress’s hand under the heel of his boot—yet, after all, a witty, brave, fantastic, original kind of creature. It was natural enough that La Grande Mademoiselle, in her fortieth year, should take a fancy to this dazzling, careles youth ; she now wanted nothing except to love and be loved by such a husband. Poor Princess ! nobody had shown much affection for her. She wanted, once in her life, to taste the sweetness of being loved by some one worth loving. She found that she liked to see and talk to Lauzun, and that the days when she did not see him were very dull indeed. She persuaded herself—this forty-year-old sentimentalist—that her adored one felt the same, but did not dare to tell her so.¹ And, still more delightful thought ! those relations of hers would lose all hope of inheriting her fortune.

She approached Lauzun insidiously—discussed ideals with him, the question of the right choice in marriage. Lauzun, amazed, uncertain, cautious, said enough to show that he had understood, then changed the

¹ Mlle DE MONTPENSIER, *Mémoires*, v. IV. pp. 92-4. To those who enjoy the study of the same individual’s point of view at different periods, we cordially recommend the reading of the passage relating to this adventure, in the earlier and later editions (Chéruel edition for the later) of the *Mémoires de Mademoiselle de Montpensier*.

subject, and emulated Mademoiselle in talking nonsense.

In the midst of all this, the Court set out (April 28, 1670) for Flanders. At Noyon, the Princess again begged Lauzun to help her in that serious difficulty—the choice of a husband. His reply was evasive: the journey was the important question just then. She asked no more, “counting M. de Lauzun’s presence enough.”

But there were vexations, nevertheless. Near Landrecies, a river in flood obliged the Court to take refuge in a miserable hovel. There was only one bed. Some mattresses were spread on the ground: “What!” cried Marie-Thérèse, “are we all to sleep in the same room? How horrible!” The King and Mademoiselle pleaded absolute necessity. The Queen lay down on the bed, in such a position that she could see the whole room. “You need only leave your curtain undrawn,” said the King, somewhat sharply. “You will see us all just as well.” Truly it was a quaint roomful! Monsieur first took a mattress, then Madame, then the King, then Mademoiselle, beside her Louise de La Vallière, and lastly Mme de Montespan. It was this last lady’s presence which disgusted Marie-Thérèse; for, by this time, her suspicions were unerring—and inevitable. But Louise, freed from *her* jealousy, was nevertheless not wholly at ease in that respect. Somebody else was jealous now of the poor lady, and that was Mademoiselle. Gaston’s daughter had—to quote her own phrase—felt that unhappy passion glide into her heart simultaneously with her love. “A silly rumour” had been circulated that Lauzun wanted to marry the Duchesse de La Vallière. A few days after the extraordinary night at Landrecies, the Princess lost control of herself, and indirectly questioned Lauzun. “No,” replied that virtuous person; “whenever the idea was suggested

to me, I invariably rejected it. My one stipulation in marriage would be that the lady should be chaste. If there had ever been the slightest divagation from that ideal, I would not have her—even if she were yourself, who are above us all.”

And the silly woman cried, “Is that really true? If it is, I like you better than ever. . . *I'm* quite—quite . . . *good!*”

Less than six weeks later, this great passion displayed itself in its true colours. The Court being at Calais, there was whispered a rumour that the King of England was about to repudiate his wife, and that he wanted to marry Mlle de Montpensier. Louis spoke of it to the Princess, who placed herself at his orders. Monsieur thought it a splendid idea, and Mme de Montespan considered it charming. The Duchesse de La Vallière said nothing. Marie-Thérèse, the most honourable-minded person there, was the only one who said the right word, and she said it instantly and sincerely: “It would be horrible,” she cried. But nobody cared what Marie-Thérèse said. As for Lauzun, he declared that he wished to goodness it was all settled—and Mademoiselle tried to persuade herself that he did not mean what he said.

The vague project soon faded into thin air; love again triumphed over ambition, and jealousy followed hard on love. Despite the talk at Avesnes, Mademoiselle was still uneasy about those horrid rumours of Lauzun's marriage to the Duchesse de La Vallière. Desperately desiring reassurance, she entered on the subject with Mme de Nogent, Lauzun's sister. “Are you not very much vexed by the gossip about your brother?” And clever Mme de Nogent declared that they had made her utterly wretched.

Never was woman in love more persistently jealous. Back in Paris, she met the Chevalier de La Hillière,

a mere Lieutenant of the Guard in M. de Lauzun's Company. He was a most insignificant person, but he had just been dining with his chief, and she could not resist the temptation of making him talk.

"What," said she, "is this gossip about *his* marrying the Duchesse de La Vallière?" "He spoke of it to me this very day," replied La Hillière, "and said, in so many words: 'I am furious with the people who talk like that; the King has never dishonoured anybody—would he be likely to begin with me?'"

This reply gave Mademoiselle evident pleasure, but nevertheless she persisted in being jealous of Louise, while she tolerated everything, even liked everything, about the Montespan—and the Court followed her lead.

While Mademoiselle was absorbed in Lauzun, and Lauzun in his unexpected stroke of luck; while the King devoted himself alternately to Mme de Montespan and to his designs on Holland; while La Vallière, forsaken and despised and cruelly entreated, struggled between her longing for retirement and her duty towards her family—Death came among them, and gave them all a solemn warning.

On Sunday, June 29, 1670, Mademoiselle was regretfully finishing one of her love-confidences to Lauzun's sister, when the Duc d'Ayen, suddenly meeting her, cried, "Madame is dying!" Instantly Mademoiselle got into her carriage. But a little farther on she met the Queen. "Madame is dying," said Marie-Thérèse, "she is dying, and do you know what she says? That she believes she has been poisoned." Bad news travels fast. All the details were already known. Madame had been in the salon at Saint-Cloud, apparently in good health; she had drunk a glass of

chicory-water, and a quarter of an hour later had exclaimed that she felt a consuming fire in her entrails—"it was killing her."

It was only too true. Death had seized upon her just when she was beginning to hope that, free from Court-frivolities, she might be able to make valuable use of her many fine qualities. She had lately returned from England, surrounded with all the joy and triumph resulting from a journey which had been undertaken for friendship's sake, and was now crowned with complete success; "she knew herself to be, at twenty-six years of age, *the* bond between the two greatest Kings of their time."¹ Her beauty and charm were enhanced by her evident happiness; in truth, she seemed, even to indifferent eyes, as lovely as an angel. Everybody, except Monsieur, had been paying homage to the new influence—as fragile as mortal life! Madame had had much to bear during her trip—fatigue, sleepless nights; and the sea-voyage had tried her constitution to such a degree that she had not yet entirely recovered from its effects. One symptom (often cited) was that she could not bear the sight of strawberries. But, always imprudent, she trifled with her precarious health, as she had been used to do with her reputation, which indeed had been saved only by dint of charm, grace, and sincerity.

June was nearly over. The exquisite weather recalled the glorious summer of 1661, and Saint-Cloud had proved as ineffective now as Fontainebleau had done then, to shade its guests from the too-importunate rays of a burning sun. Henrietta bathed, against her doctor's orders, walked late by moonlight, yet com-

¹ *Histoire de Madame Henriette*, p. 165 and *seq.* The first part of the book—that dictated and sometimes written by Madame in 1669 (see Preface by Mme DE LA FAYETTE)—ends with the year 1665. The second part begins in June, 1670.

plained all the time of a pain in the side. On the morning of Sunday, June 29, although she had had a good night, she said to her confidante, Mme de La Fayette, that she felt very cross ; but "her bad humour would have been the good humour of any other woman, she was naturally so gentle."

At that time no one knew, but now every one knows, what was making Madame "cross." She had been obliged to write to a Princess who was trying to reconcile her with Monsieur. Let us read this letter, which almost represents her last will and testament : "I was sure," she wrote, "that on my return I should find everybody in good humour, but things are worse than ever." She had been charged by Monsieur to obtain from Charles II. (1) an agreement about all the matters in dispute between Charles and himself—granted ; (2) a pension for his son—almost promised ; (3) the return of the Chevalier de Lorraine (to be solicited from Louis XIV.)—declined, though an asylum in England was offered to the Chevalier. So that, on the whole, her mediation had not been unfruitful. But "Monsieur would listen to nothing, so long as they refused him his Chevalier ;" and then Madame declared, "They will get nothing from me by force."

"The only thing for me to do," she added, "is to wait and see what Monsieur desires. If he wishes me to act, I shall do so with the greatest pleasure, for I know no true happiness unless he is pleased with me. If not, I shall keep that silence which will be the only possible course for me in such circumstances, expecting him, as I do, to torment me in every way that he can devise. I shall not defend myself, except by trying to give him no cause for blame. Hatred is an affair of choice, but esteem is not ; and I venture to say that if I suffer from the one without having deserved it,

I am not absolutely unworthy of the other, for many reasons ; and this confirms me to some extent in the hope that he may have some kinder feeling for me later on."¹

With this consolatory reflection, she closed her letter and went to Mass. On her return, she went to see an English artist (Lely?) who was painting her daughter and husband. Then, being a little tired, she fell asleep. During her slumber she changed so considerably that Mme de La Fayette, who had not left her, and could now observe her at leisure, was amazed, and reflected that her mind must have added much to the beauty of her face, since it was so charming when she was awake, and so plain when she was asleep—an effect which may have been peculiar to that day, but is incontestable, for other people noticed the same thing.²

Madame, when she awoke about five o'clock in the evening, looked so ill that Monsieur himself remarked on it. The pain in her side persisted. Almost immediately she asked for, and was handed by Mme de Gourdon, a glass of chicory-water which had been fetched by Mme de Gamaches. She drank it, and immediately put her hand to her side, crying, "Ah ! the pain—I can't bear it !" She flushed, turned pale—then livid. They lifted her as if she were a broken thing, and, once in bed, she writhed with agony. The first doctor who was called, M. Esprit, thought it was colic ; but Henrietta assured him that he was mistaken—she was going to die ; and she asked for a confessor. Then, turning to her husband, she embraced him, and with a gentleness that was infinitely touching, "Alas ! Monsieur," she said, "you have long ceased to love

¹ RAVAISSON, *Archives de la Bastille*, v. IV. pp. 33, 36 ; GUY-PATIN, *Lettres*, v. III. p. 364, speaks of the mediation of the Princess Palatine as dating from April 8, 1670. He alludes to it as being even then successful. He was quite mistaken.

² D'ORMESSON, *Journal*, v. II. p. 593.

me ; but you are unjust. I have never failed you." Monsieur seemed much moved. She had been imprudent—but was *he* blameless? The hour of expiation was sounding for every one, and for him first of all.

Suddenly Madame cried that "they must examine the water she had drunk from—it was poisoned ; somebody must have made a mistake in the bottles."¹ She was sure she was poisoned—she felt that, and asked for an antidote. At this, Mme de La Fayette could not help glancing at Monsieur. But Philippe, quite untroubled, ordered that some of the water should be given to a dog. He even drank some of it himself. The instinctive distrust which surrounded him was a fit punishment for the many outrageous remarks he had made—as, for instance, that his wife was dying, and that a witch had told him he should be twice married. The Court, the country, nay, all Europe, felt the same uneasy suspicion ; and posterity long looked with a doubtful eye on Monsieur's memory. Madame persisted in thinking that she had been poisoned, and she seemed to think it might have been intentional. When Sainte-Foi, Monsieur's head *valet-de-chambre*, brought her the antidote (some powder of vipers) she said that she would take it from *his* hand, because she trusted him.²

But the *curé* de Saint-Cloud had heard Henrietta's confession. When it was finished, she said in a low voice to her husband some words which no one else

¹ *Histoire de Madame Henriette*, p. 174. Bossuet reports that Madame said to the Maréchal de Grammont that she believed she had been poisoned by mistake (*Lettre de Bossuet*; FLOQUET, *Études sur la vie de Bossuet*, v. III. p. 416).

² *Histoire de Madame Henriette*, pp. 175, 193 ; *L'État de la France pour 1669*, p. 405, mentions as belonging to Monsieur's household, among the four *valets-de-chambre*, sleeping in the house and having the keys of the coffers, Jacques Thivol, M. de Sainte-Foy. His wages were 600 *livres* a year. His quarter was from April to June.

could hear, but which seemed gentle and affectionate. Drawing nearer every moment to that tribunal where none may dare to lie, she now again asseverated that she had never failed in her duty as a wife. She believed that she had been poisoned, but she never dreamed of accusing her husband of the crime. By Philippe's orders, the bells of the church at Saint-Cloud were rung, the Canons were assembled, Prayers for the Sick were said. Three hours later two more physicians arrived, Vallot and Gueslin. As soon as Madame saw the latter, in whom she had great confidence, she told him that she had been poisoned, and that he must treat her accordingly. However, after consultation, the three doctors asserted "on their lives" that there was no danger. Monsieur hastened to tell Madame. She answered as at first, "that she knew how ill she was better than the doctors did, and that there was no cure for her"—and that with as much composure and gentleness "as if she had been speaking of an indifferent matter." Her suffering was so great, though, that she wished to die. "If I were not a Christian, I should kill myself."

At eleven o'clock, the King, the Queen, M^{me} de Soissons, and Mademoiselle de Montpensier, arrived. Then came those two who were called *the Ladies*—the Marquise de Montespan and Louise de La Vallière, chained together, as usual. The Maréchal de Grammont, M. de Guiche's father, entered at the same moment. And thus, present or represented, we meet again the *dramatis personæ* of all the intrigues we have narrated, which had been so momentous to those concerned when life was lusty in their veins, but now were paled into such miserable insignificance before the presence of death. By the time these visitors arrived, Madame had already been obliged to leave her state-couch. She was on a little bedstead, her hair hanging

loose about her—for there had been no time to arrange it for the night—her garments unfastened at the neck and arms. She was so emaciated, so pale, so shrunk, that they might have thought her dead if she had not exclaimed, "Look at the state I am in!" At her words, the tears came to everybody's eyes.

In such supreme moments, character is fully revealed. The King was kind and full of feeling, though more composed than those around him. Madame said—and he knew how true it was—that he was losing the most faithful servant he had ever had; and when, to encourage her, he praised her fortitude, "You know," she said, "that I have never been afraid of death, but only of losing your good graces." Louis then spoke to her of God, and, with further eulogy of her courage, recommended her to be submissive in the hour of death; later, by Monsieur's advice, he ordered that some one should fetch Bossuet, and that all preparations for the Last Communion should be made. When he left her, Henrietta embraced him tenderly, and said a last confidential word to him. Seeing his eyes full of tears, she begged him not to weep, for it would grieve her too much. She added then: "The first news you will hear to-morrow will be of my death."¹ Those were her last words to the King. She also embraced the Queen, who had been very kind to her since she had grown more serious. Marie-Thérèse, indeed, was the only person who had nothing to reproach herself for in connection with the errors of Madame's young life—now so suddenly cut short.

Mademoiselle, who did not like invalids, pretended to be so overcome that she could not approach Madame. She said her good-bye from the foot of the bed.

¹ M. Floquet is wrong in saying that she asked at once for "Monsieur de Condom! Monsieur de Condom!" (*Études*, v. III, p. 393).

Moreover, she was officiously busy, for no one, in her opinion, was sufficiently distressed—no one would have thought of anything if it had not been for her ! But, at bottom, her sole preoccupation was with the effect which this event was going to have upon her own destiny. She was scarcely back at Versailles, and Henrietta was still alive, when “ This is disconcerting for us,” she remarked to Lauzun.

The Maréchal de Grammont, who had also come to Saint-Cloud, drew near. Madame, as if to excuse herself for the anxiety she had caused this honest gentleman by her intrigues with his son, M. de Guiche, spoke a gentle word to him and told him that he was losing a good friend. She added that at first she had thought that she had been poisoned by mistake. Doubtless the asseverations of the doctors had caused her to change her mind.

Were any words exchanged between Henrietta and Mme de Soissons, who had been successively her ally, her rival, and her accomplice—corrupt and perverse, though, while Madame was nothing worse than giddy ? And did Henrietta find anything to say to her former Maid-of-Honour ? The contemporary memoirs do not report any such conversations. The Italian woman, as was proved later on, was not a person to lose her head over a poisoning ; but what can have been the thoughts, what the feelings, in the upright mind and tender heart of La Vallière, when she saw the sudden cutting-down of that Princess who had been the cause of her elevation and of her error !

“ O Death, how cruel is thy coming to those who have never thought on thee, whose hopes have been wholly set upon the things of this world ! O Death, how terrible thou art to those whose joys end with life, and whose fears and agonies begin but with thee ! ”¹

¹ *Réflexions sur la miséricorde de Dieu*, v. I. p. 97, 23rd Reflection.

These reflections, made by Louise when she herself was at the gates of death, must have been recalled to her with overwhelming force at the spectacle of this frightful agony!

At last the crowd of visitors, both sympathetic and indifferent, retired. There stayed near Madame only her chaplain and M. Feuillet. Her ordinary confessor, this chaplain, the Reverend Father Chrysostom,¹ was a Capuchin with a handsome beard, who cut a striking figure in the official escorts; but it was no moment then to think of appearances, and, while he was somewhat confusedly wandering on, the dying woman suddenly begged him to let M. Feuillet speak—then, lest this should hurt his feelings, Henrietta, gentle to the last, added kindly, “You shall speak later.” It was then eleven o’clock at night.

Feuillet was an austere man, and so plain-spoken that he had been prohibited from preaching, but he was full of zeal. He was very sceptical on the subject of death-bed repentances, and therefore did everything he could to excite genuine contrition in the soul of the woman who was soon to appear before the Sovereign Tribunal.

“Madame, your life has been all sin. You must use the little time you have left to you in repentance.”

“Show me how to do it—hear my confession, I beseech you.” And then Henrietta confessed again, and God inspired her with feelings which surprised her confessor. She spoke in a wholly spiritual strain, earnestly asking to be allowed to receive the

For a long time Louise and Madame had been on very good terms, witness this article in the *Comptes de la maison du roi*, v. I. p. 359: “To the *sieur* Nocret, for a portrait of Madame la Duchesse d’Orléans, which he painted and hung over the fireplace in Mme de La Vallière’s small room.”

¹ Jean Chrysostome d’Amiens, Capuchin, confessor and preacher-in-ordinary (*État de la France pour 1669*, v. I. p. 434).

Holy Sacrament. While some one went to fetch the *curé*, Feuillet loudly resumed :

"Humble yourself, Madame, beneath the mighty hand of God, which can destroy all human greatness. You are but a miserable sinner, but an earthen vessel broken in pieces—of all your glories, there remains not a trace."

"'Tis true, O my God," said the dying woman.

Her anguish touched the stern priest, and he spoke some gentler words. They consoled Henrietta ; her dying eyes lit up. Then she asked for the cross which the Queen-mother had used on her death-bed, and kissed it very humbly.

The English Ambassador, Lord Montagu, had been one of the first to hasten to his Sovereign's sister. He was not in the Royal confidence with regard to the negotiations now proceeding against the Triple Alliance ; but Madame, by some guarded admissions, had contrived to render his position less embarrassing. Now that death seemed so near, she charged him to tell King Charles that, in persuading him to the French Alliance, she had been convinced all along that his honour and profit were bound up with those of the King of France. Lord Montagu then asked if she did not think she had been poisoned. "I do not know if she said she did," reports Mme de La Fayette ; "but I do know that she said he must say nothing of it to the King her brother, for such a grievous thing must be kept from him—and above all, he must on no account be allowed to think of any revenge, if he did hear it, for the King of France was not guilty of it ; there must be no feeling against *him*." M. Feuillet overheard the word "poison," though the Ambassador spoke in English, and, "Madame," said he, "accuse no one, and offer up your death to God ; think of that alone." But when Montagu repeated his question,

Henrietta "answered only by a movement of the shoulders."

At this moment the Viaticum was brought. "O my God!" said Henrietta, "I am unworthy that you should come to visit a miserable sinner like myself." "Yes, Madame, you are unworthy," continued Feuillet, "but He has been gracious, and has allowed you to make yourself ready. . . Abase yourself now before the God of Mercy." After having communicated, the Princess begged that they would administer Extreme Unction, while the Divine Goodness still preserved her mind clear. But then, her pain increasing: "Oh, Heavens!" she added, "do me the kindness to bleed me in the foot—I am stifling."

"Madame, let the doctors decide; think no more of your flesh; save your soul, and that only."

Nevertheless, the doctors decided to bleed her. While the Holy Oil was being applied, Feuillet, growing harsher as time went by, said loudly, "The Church implores God, Madame, to forgive you all your sins—your evil words, your joy in perfumes and odours, your illicit looks and speeches, your slanders, your concupiscence, your evil deeds, forbidden by the law of God. . ." There was so short a time for the dying woman to repent in that perhaps we may not wholly censure Feuillet for his severity; nevertheless, we cannot but pity the patient: "My God!" she cried, "will this fearful anguish never cease?"

"Come! Madame—you forget yourself. You have offended God for twenty-six years" (the poor lady was exactly twenty-six!), "and your penance has lasted only six hours. You should rather say, with St. Augustine: 'Cut, wound, dismember me; let my heart ache; let my body suffer; let my bones be poured out like water; let worms feed upon my flesh—provided the love of Thee be in my heart, O God!'"

"I hope, Madame," Feuillet resumed, "that you will remember your promises."

"Yes, sir; and I conjure you, if God restores me to health, which I think is not to be, that you will call upon me to keep them."

"Madame, I assure you that your pain will soon be over."

"At what hour did Jesus Christ die?"

"At three o'clock."

"Perhaps He will be gracious to me, and let me die at the same hour." Then she took the last draught which the doctors offered her.

At last Bossuet arrived. "She was as pleased to see him as he was grieved to see her." Madame had been under his influence for some time; and, in recognition of his teaching, she had had a fine emerald mounted in a ring for him. Now, though almost expiring, she remembered this, and ordered that it should be given him when she was no more; but she gave this order in English, "true to the last to her delicate sense of courtesy."

Bossuet lavished his tenderest eloquence, reciting Acts of faith, penitence, and love. He stopped for an instant, and she said, "Do you think, sir, that I do not hear you because I have turned away a little? Pray continue a while." The pain decreased towards midnight. She thought she might sleep, and asked to be allowed to try. Bossuet went away for an instant, "to get some fresh air." But shortly the invalid turned round, and seeing Feuillet: "I beg," she said, "that M. de Condom be called! M. Feuillet, this is the end of me."

"Well, Madame, are you not glad to have finished your course so soon? After so short a fight, you will enjoy the exceeding great reward."

Bossuet came back, but she could no longer speak.

He began the Prayers for the Dead, while Feuillet went on exhorting the dying creature. "In two or three minutes she gave up her soul to God." Madame died peacefully enough on Monday, June 30, at half-past two in the morning. She was only just twenty-six years old.

This tragic event left a lasting impression. Her first words, her profound conviction—unchanged until the very moment of death, when she had renounced this life and pardoned every one in it—that idea of hers of having been poisoned, spread so fast that her entire household requested that there should be an autopsy of the body.¹ Monsieur consented. The King delegated his own physician, Vallot, to be present.² The Ambassador of England, whom they guessed to be suspicious, was asked to be present also, with any physicians and surgeons he might select. The examination was carefully made. The first conclusion was that the death was a natural one, attributable to cholera-morbus—hence there could be no reasonable suspicion of any kind of poisoning.³ It seems, however, that the English were not at all so convinced as the French, and that they did find traces of poison.⁴

¹ An illness so short and so painful was sufficiently astonishing to create speculation. Monsieur, at the urgent request of his household, ordered that a *post-mortem* be made." (*Relation de la maladie, mort, et ouverture du corps de Madame*, by the Abbé BOURDELLOT, Physician, in v. III. p. 414, of the *Mémoires intéressants pour servir à l'histoire de France*, by PONCET DE LA GRAVE, Paris, 1789.)

² Vallot gave his private opinion on the cause of Madame's death. He considered it a natural one. See *Archives de la Bastille*, v. IV. p. 37.

³ "The whole conclusion is that Madame died from cholera-morbus, the signs of which are well known, and preclude any idea of poison" (Narrative by Bourdelot,—or perhaps *after* Bourdelot). But one cannot forget that this capable man ended by poisoning himself by mistake!

⁴ Bourdelot asserts that "he convinced the English Ambassador and

Very soon afterwards, a pamphlet with insinuations against Monsieur came into circulation, and was attributed to Lord Montagu, who vaguely disavowed it. As a matter of fact, the English Ambassador always thought that Madame *had* been poisoned.¹

Although the declaration of the French doctors had to be accepted as the official truth, and although the King had already decided to take the same favourable view of the sad event, there still was great uneasiness. The document assigning the death to natural causes was not yet signed when, on the evening of June 30, Louis, after his *coucher* and the retirement of all the courtiers, rose again, sent for the Lieutenant of his Guard, Brissac,² and ordered him to fetch Madame's head-steward instantly from Saint-Cloud.³ In a few hours the steward arrived at Versailles.

"My friend," said the King, looking him up and down, "listen to me. If you confess all—if you tell me the truth about all that I shall ask you—whatever you may have done I pardon you, and there shall be no more said about it; but take care to hide nothing from me, for if you do, you will be dead before you leave this place. . . Was not Madame poisoned?"

Milord, who were present," that the death was a natural one. But perhaps he flattered himself. "Madame," says Boileau, "died a natural death, according to the French doctors; was poisoned, according to the English ones" (*Archives de la Bastille*, v. IV. p. 36).

¹ Letter from Lord Montagu, *Vie de Madame*, p. 203. He also wrote on July 6: "I am not sufficiently skilled in medicine to know whether she was poisoned or not."

² SAINT-SIMON, v. II. p. 226, for the year 1701. We have carefully studied Saint-Simon's account. The *État de la France pour 1669* certainly gives Brissac as Lieutenant of the Company of d'Aumont. It may be said that M. d'Aumont's term of service did not begin till July; but, as a measure of precaution, the King usually caused the Lieutenant of one Company to serve with the Captain of another. Brissac, therefore, would have served at a different time from his Captain. See *État*, v. I. p. 162.

³ According to Saint-Simon, the Steward was called Pumon, and that is the name given him in the *État de la France*, v. I. p. 438.

"Yes, Sire."

"And who poisoned her, and how was it done?"

"It was the Chevalier de Lorraine who sent the poison to Beuvron and d'Effiat."

Then the King, repeating his promise of pardon and his threats of death: "And did my brother know of it?"

"No, Sire." Madame's servant added that the poisoners had not enough confidence in Monsieur to associate him in a plot which he would have prevented, or even perhaps denounced.¹

At these words the King uttered a great "Oh!" of relief. "That is all I wanted to know," he said, and the steward was taken back in secret, as he had come.

If ever an interview was private, this one surely must have been so. Between the servant and Saint-Simon, who has left us this narrative, there was but one "middleman," the Procureur-Général, Joli de Fleury, and we may remark that a relative of Joli's belonged (also in the capacity of Procureur) to Monsieur's Household. There is another convincing feature: Monsieur's second wife, the Princess Palatine, who was so concerned to render an exact account of these matters, gives in substance the same facts as Saint-Simon. D'Effiat, on the day of the crime, was found handling Madame's goblet, and rubbing it with a piece of paper. A *valet-de-chambre*, whom

¹ "No, Sire; none of us was foolish enough to tell him, for he cannot keep a secret—he would have ruined us" (SAINT-SIMON, v. II. p. 226, 1865 edition). The second Madame, in her *Correspondance*, gives a good version of this part of the plot: "When the scoundrels were arranging to poison poor Madame, they discussed the question of telling or not telling Monsieur. The Chevalier de Lorraine said, 'No, don't tell him; he can't hold his tongue. Even if he doesn't speak the first year, he'll have us hanged perhaps ten years afterwards.' And it is known that the wretches added, 'We'll take care we don't tell Monsieur, for he would tell the King, and the King would hang us'" (*Correspondance*, v. I. p. 252). See again *Ibid.* v. II. p. 206.

the Palatine afterwards had in her service, entered just then, and said to D'Effiat : " Sir, what are you doing at our sideboard, and why are you touching Madame's cup ? " Quite coolly, D'Effiat replied that he was desperately thirsty and had been looking for something to drink, and that, seeing the cup had been used, he had been drying it.¹ This is important. The drink, which Monsieur and others took without any ill-effects, was innocuous ; it was the cup which needed examination.

A few years after the event, Lord Montagu wrote to the Prime Minister of England that if Madame Henriette had been poisoned, " as everybody thinks," France and all Europe considered the Chevalier de Lorraine to have been her murderer.

The last word would have been said, there could be no further discussion, did we not know that the occasion of the Ambassador's declaration was the Chevalier's return to France, his appointment to the rank of Field-Marshal and his redoubled favour with Monsieur ; did we not also know that D'Effiat not only was left quite undisturbed, but actually went on living at the Palais-Royal and Saint-Cloud. These arrangements upset all argument. It would almost seem that they were specially designed to obscure any definite opinion on the cause of Madame's death. But all was of no avail to remove entirely the suspicion of poisoning. One thing, however, is certain : Monsieur was not guilty. Saint-Simon, and the second Madame, both prove that over and over again. And a still better testimony is the following : La Grande Mademoiselle, who had such a horror of death, would have

¹ *Correspondance complète de Madame*, v. II. p. 522 ; SAINT-SIMON, v. II. p. 229. The Palatine had it from the *valet-de-chambre*, Saint-Simon from Joli de Fleury, who had interrogated Madame Henriette's steward.

liked to marry Monsieur. But she would have insisted on the removal of all the Household then surrounding him.

Thus perished, in the flower of her age, the charming Madame. She was the first to leave the stage on which she had been followed by Louise de La Vallière. Both had grievously erred ; but for the survivor, expiation was to occupy the greater half of life. For the other, it seemed that the sufferings of a whole existence had been concentrated into a few hours. Both had, in their brief careers, apparently so triumphant, experienced more pain than pleasure. The physician Bourdelot, who repudiated the idea of poison, said, in assigning a probable cause for Madame's sudden death, that "her great troubles had outworn her strength."

Whatever their secret thoughts may have been, Louis XIV. and Charles II. solemnly exchanged condolences. The Maréchal de Bellefonds took the French King's message to London. The King of England sent his by the Duke of Buckingham about the beginning of August. The Duke was received with the highest honours, and his mission ended in festivities which contrasted oddly with the mournful cause of his journey. One of these parties was extremely intimate and amusing. Lauzun invited the Ambassador and two of his suite to supper. He had arranged that they should meet three charming ladies, "one of his mistresses" (we are not told which), the Marquise de La Vallière, sister-in-law of the Duchess,¹ and the plump, merry Mme de Thianges, that sister of the Montespan's whose maxim was that no one grew old

¹ The text whence we take this anecdote says "cousin"—which is erroneous.

who loved good cheer. The guests were feasting gaily to the sound of divers instruments, when there entered a masked cavalier, hand-in-hand with two masked ladies. The three began to dance. Then Lauzun's ladies, surrounding the trio, began to dance too, and at each change of figure affected to admire the stranger's sword—at last actually taking possession of it, and offering it to the Duke. Finally, the cavalier and his companions unmasked, and proved to be the King and Mme de Montespan. (The second lady is not named.) Louis, approaching Buckingham, told him that, disarmed by the ladies, he now begged acceptance of his sword.¹ The sword and belt were valued at over 20,000 *écus*.²

We see by this that the rumours of a projected union between Monsieur and Mademoiselle did not greatly trouble Lauzun, who must by this time have lost all hope for himself in that direction. Less than six hours after Madame's death—how quickly the most startling events grow to seem natural!—the King, drawing Mlle de Montpensier aside, said to her: "My cousin, here is a vacant place: will you fill it?" "You are the master, Sire; I can have no will but yours." The King pressed her further: "Have you any aversion to the idea?" She did not answer. According to herself, she was as pale as death, and confused, embarrassed; yet Louis, who was observant enough, got the impression that she approved his

¹ Despatch from M. de Iturieta, Spanish Ambassador, Sept. 4, 1670. He says he heard the story from one of the ladies present. Decidedly, ladies are dangerous! But this time the reporter, though indiscreet, was at any rate veracious. See the *Gazette de France*, September, 1670.

² That is the figure given by the *Gazette*. Don Iturieta's reporter said more than 16,000 *louis*. A proof of the Spanish Ambassador's veracity is that when he declared that his informant was a woman, he carefully added: "I daresay the valuation is a little excessive" (*Archives de la Bastille*, v. IV. p. 46).

project. "I will see what I can do," he said, "and let you know how it goes on." Shortly afterwards, between October 9 and 22, the Court being at Chambord, Mademoiselle, Mme de Montespan, the Duchesse de La Vallière, and M. de Lauzun were playing some game. Lauzun was ostentatiously oblivious of Mademoiselle, who suddenly discovered that the ribbon of her cuff was untied. She begged the little man to fasten it for her, but he felt incapable of doing it correctly, so the Princess had to accept the service from her supposed rival, Mme de La Vallière—and yet she still felt captivated by Lauzun's manners, looks, jokes, and courtier-like reserves!¹ His power increased as the chances of a marriage with Monsieur—that unchanging iceberg!—waned (October 3-22, 1670). Mademoiselle, whose fortieth birthday fell that autumn, fastened more tenaciously than ever on her idea of making Lauzun happy.

He showed consummate skill, and affected to be ready to immolate himself discreetly for the sake of the future Madame's glory. But, all the same, he was arranging some useful friendships for himself. He approached the Montespan, who was a great friend of Mademoiselle's; and, moreover, he took up at Saint-Germain the part which Colbert had been accustomed to play at the Hôtel Brion. When the Marquise produced her first adulterous baby, it was Lauzun who carried it under his cloak across the little park, and gave it to the Widow Scarron. He also succeeded, by marvellous feats of tact, in getting the favourite's niece, Mlle de Thianges, married to M. de Nevers, that "terribly irresolute" person. With his help, Mme de Montespan was indeed doing wonders.

Though tolerant of others' errors, he professed a great fastidiousness for himself, and so far was he from

¹ Mlle DE MONTPENSIER, v. IV. p. 167.

being capable of dishonouring himself by marrying La Vallière, that he would not hear of an alliance which was suggested with the family of M. de Roquelaure. "He would not marry at all if he could not do better than that." Mademoiselle was utterly overwhelmed by all these proofs of devotion, and offered herself to the proud fellow. And yet, whenever Lauzun's marriage with a person unknown was gossipped of, the name which first came to everybody's lips was that of La Vallière! The amazement was supreme when they heard for certain that the "person" was Mlle de Montpensier.

Incredible! Mademoiselle, grand-daughter of Henri IV., cousin-german to the King! Yet evidently true—for had not the King given his consent? The principal nobles came to thank her for the honour she was doing to the gentlemen of France. Colbert himself offered to arrange Lauzun's affairs for him, and actually began work on the contract. Louise de La Vallière, like all the rest of the Court, offered her congratulations to Mademoiselle. For many reasons, Louise had never desired for that lady a marriage in which there was neither glory nor passion. She knew the husband-elect too well to have any illusions about the success of the singular alliance. Very unaffectedly, very simply, she congratulated Lauzun's sister, and Mademoiselle. "You are doing a fine thing," she said to the Princess; "I am very glad of it—M. de Lauzun is a friend of mine." Mademoiselle made no reply.

But politicians have harder hearts and less facile fancies than middle-aged single ladies. Louvois, above all, detested "the little man."¹ So far back as 1668,

¹ See C. ROUSSET, *Histoire de Louvois*, v. I, p. 237. The learned historian speaks of Lauzun as a "madman." Ambitious he was, but madman he was not. This affair is not relevant enough to our story for us to treat it at length. But let us, at any rate, warn our readers against Saint-Simon, who must have mixed up two anecdotes. If, in

he had forced the King to break a promise to his favourite, and take from him the post of Grand-Master of Artillery. So far satisfied, his jealousy broke out anew when in 1670 the King gave Lauzun, who was a good commander—on parade, at any rate—the title of General of the Army. The suspicious Louvois scented “a cabal” behind this marriage, which was favoured by Mme de Montespan, and, more significantly, by Colbert. He made up his mind, and began his opposition on December 8. Lauzun heard of it, and instantly knew the game was up. But Mademoiselle—undaunted, if nothing more—restored his sinking confidence. Louis continued to authorise the preliminaries, though they went very slowly. Then an obscure woman intervened—and intervened with genius! Mme Scarron, the youthful widow of an old gouty poet, the future wife of an old King, disapproved of an elderly Princess taking for her husband a young cavalier. What were her reasons? Much as she wrote, discussed, and analysed, she has left this topic untouched. All we know is that Louvois’ new ally managed to scare Mme de Montespan. She pointed out “that the Royal Family, nay! the King himself, would one day reproach her for the step she was inducing him to take.” The favourite allowed herself to be convinced, and in her turn convinced the King—at her own well-chosen hour.

And simultaneously a very strong and very illustrious opposition-party sprang up. Its members were the Prince de Condé, Madame d’Orléans (Mademoiselle’s step-mother), and, actually, Marie-Thérèse herself! The haughty blood of Spain shuddered at the thought

March, 1669, Lauzun had treated the favourite as he is said to have done in the Duke’s *Mémoires*, how could he possibly have been friends with her in 1671? M. Clément, in his *Madame de Montespan et Louis XIV.*, has also confused dates.

of such a *mésalliance*. Louis also was a proud monarch. His early yielding had perhaps been due to a malicious desire to see his quondam foe make herself ridiculous. But his Minister's advice and his own natural good sense, had quickly modified his ideas ; and his last scruples disappeared when he read the contract which lavished on Lauzun property which was supposed to belong to the House of France. He took back his promise—and the plan, so admired one day, was seen to be utterly ridiculous the next !

Lauzun behaved quietly—seemed more than resigned to his fate. Mademoiselle maintained that he wept. If he did, she alone beheld it. But *she* wept, sighed, shrieked, for two. “O this wretched worldly life !” The dejected lady, who had refused to see either her step-mother or her sister, sent for Mme de Montespan, and wildly urged her to speak to the King. The favourite spoke all the more sympathetically because she had betrayed the unfortunate Mademoiselle. Louise de La Vallière, tender-hearted as always, turned quite naturally to the victim, and tried to console her. “I pity you very deeply,” she said. “For a lady in your position to have done all you have done without any result is truly sad. As for M. de Lauzun, *he* is not to be pitied ; the King will give him greater dignities and favours than you could have given him ; and, even if he should never marry—well ! so much the better for him.”

Mademoiselle did not appreciate these home-truths. More than four years afterwards she could not help saying, “I thought what she said very stupid !” And, in fact, it was *not* perhaps very consoling for a disappointed lady-in-love.

Only an analyst of the feminine heart could be sure if, in speaking thus to Mademoiselle of her advances to Lauzun, the Duchess was remembering the year's

dole of sarcasms about her imaginary pretensions to his hand. Louise was not given to make reprisals. But she was disillusioned ; she was beginning to see the world as it really is : " If he never marries, so much the better for him ! " She was thought to be shallow, yet she had seen through Lauzun, and guessed that his mobile affections were incongruous with marriage-bonds ; for, now that she felt herself for ever shut out from the Promised Land, she had a very lofty idea of marriage—marriage, outside of which neither a sheltered life nor a lasting affection can be hoped for.

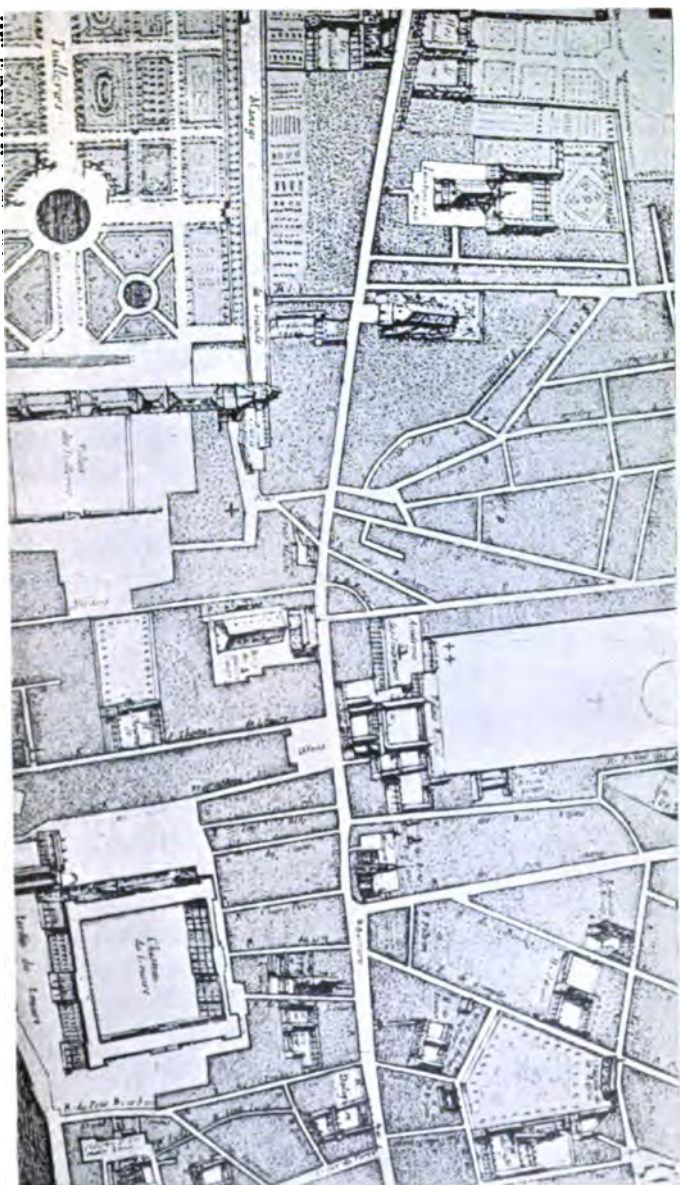
CHAPTER VI

FEBRUARY, 1671—APRIL, 1672

SUNDAY, February 7, was marked by two festivities of a very different character. In the morning, the whole Court attended at the "benediction" given to the Abbess of Fontevrault, Marie-Magdeleine-Gabrielle de Rochechouart, "sister of Mme de Montespan," as the *Gazette de France* was careful to remind its readers. In the evening, the Court went to the Hôtel de Guise, which was lit by two thousand lanterns. It was for the wedding of Henriette de Lorraine d'Harcourt that this grand supper, honoured by the presence of the King and Queen, was given.¹ La Vallière was doubtless also there, for Mme de Guise had been a friend of hers both at Blois and at the Luxembourg. On the following Tuesday (Shrove-Tuesday) a great ball was announced to take place at the Tuileries.² But a sort of wave of uneasiness seemed to be passing over social life, and the ball

¹ Mme DE SÉVIGNÉ, *Lettres*, v. II. pp. 63, 67. I am unable to interpret, in M. Régnier's fashion, or indeed in any fashion, the passage in Letter 136 (for February 18): "I heard that a tall man"—and so forth. There can be no doubt that the King was present at the ball: that is shown by Mademoiselle's *Mémoires*.

² "On the 3rd, their Majesties enjoyed the ballet of *Psyché*, and the next day all the festivities ended in a great ball in the Palace of the Tuileries, where the whole Court, with the exception of Monsieur, who was still in mourning, took part in a masquerade—wonderfully beautiful and brilliant" (*Gazette de France*, February [?] 9, 1671)



After a plan by Bullet in 1676.

+ Hotel de La Vallière. + Hotel Brion.
THE PALAIS-ROYAL AND THE TUILERIES.

9. 11. 1941

only just escaped being postponed. Neither Mme de Montespan nor the Duchesse de La Vallière appeared at it. "Never had there been such general depression." If any one had raised the masks, what a mixture of surprise and curiosity would he have caught in every face! What could be going on in the rooms of "*the Ladies*"? In those apartments, echoing with the sounds of revelry and music from the ball-room close by—in those apartments it was that Louise at last resolved to escape from the world. In the end she had revolted once for all against her rival's many insults, which were tolerated, even encouraged, by the King; and since nothing is so audacious as infuriated weakness, the gentle timid creature had gone straight to the master himself.¹ And, relieved at having spoken out frankly all her secret bitterness, utterly disillusioned, despairing of "overcoming her enemies," still less of improving them by her good example, her only thought now was to find an asylum for her grief. Eight years before she had been in the same Palace, at the same hour, dejected and wretched, refusing to sleep until the King's forgiveness should restore her peace of mind. But now she could not cheat her misery with any hope of his return. The King was at the ball, and where he would go when it was over she knew but too well. Must she wait again, until he should pass by, and throw his little dog into her arms as he did so, saying, "That is good enough for you"? . . . How long the gay night must have seemed to her! She had not even any preparations to make, which might have occupied and so shortened those hours of mortal anguish. Louise did not intend to take any-

¹ "She had spoken impertinently to the King the night before (the night before Ash-Wednesday, that is)" (*Lettre de Mme de Montmorency à Bussy, Correspondance de Bussy*, v. 1. p. 379).

thing away with her—as she had gained all through the love of her lover-King, so she now left all to the King unfaithful. She put on again her grey gown, the “little La Vallière gown.”¹ If she could never retrieve the innocence of her youth, she could at least wear the livery of its poverty. But her son! her daughter! Neither was there to stretch out little loving arms: Mme Colbert had the King’s children. There was nothing to restrain the forsaken woman. At six o’clock, taking advantage of the last hours of darkness, she escaped for the second time, without saying a word, leaving only a letter addressed to Louis,² and went to the Convent of Sainte-Marie de Chaillot.³ She entered it at dawn on the day when the Church reminds us all that dust we are, and to dust shall return. But, mercifully, its terrible warning is followed on Ash-Wednesday by words of consolation: “Hear what the Lord saith: Return unto me with all your hearts—with fastings, with tears, with groanings. Turn ye unto the Lord, for He is bountiful in mercy. . . Who knows what mercy He may show unto you?” That inspiring word “mercy”—later on to be Louise’s name in religion—was the one which that day’s service murmured oftenest in her ear.

¹ D’ORMESSON, *Journal*, v. II. p. 610. Grey was the colour of the Vallières.

² Mademoiselle insinuates that Lauzun helped Louise to compose the letter.

³ Mlle DE MONTPENSIER, v. IV. p. 260; SÉVIGNÉ, Letter 134, v. II. p. 62. It seems that one of Mme de Sévigné’s letters is missing, for she would scarcely have begun her tale with “The Duchesse de La Vallière asked the King,” etc. See GUY-PATIN, *Lettres*, v. III. p. 417; *Correspondance de Bussy*, v. I. p. 379. Let us point out a slight mistake which has eluded the vigilant editor of Bussy’s Correspondence. “I foresaw the retreat of Mme de La Vallière more than four months ago,” wrote Bussy on Feb. 7, 1671, Letter 348. Now La Vallière fled on February 11. I suspect that Bussy wrote “four years” instead of “four months.” The change had, in fact, begun in 1667.

The King's conduct, when he heard of this sudden flight, put the finishing-touch to the changes which time had produced. He did not hasten in pursuit of Louise. His departure for Versailles took place at the hour already arranged. Punctually, he got into his carriage; and beside him sat Mme de Montespan and Mlle de Montpensier. Nevertheless, when once they had fairly started, Louis could not help weeping. The Montespan followed his example. Mademoiselle, who did not love La Vallière, but who was addicted just then to weeping—at the Opera, at balls, anywhere, in fact—mingled her tears with theirs. For the rest, the King kept his head, and did not neglect his great political projects, but worked on that day quite as hard as on any other—as his correspondence proves.

On reflection, though, he resolved (our history will show why) to take Louise away from the Convent. First of all, he despatched Lauzun, who, for his part, was quite ready to bring back the rival of his enemy, the Montespan. But Lauzun failed. M. de Bellefonds failed too, though to him—for she respected his character—Louise spoke with less reserve. She charged him to tell the King “that she would have left the Court sooner after having lost the honour of his favour, if she had been able to persuade herself to do without seeing him; that this weakness had been so great that even now she was barely capable of offering that sacrifice to God, but that she wished to use as her penance the remains of her passion for him, and that, after having given him her youth, the rest of her life was not too much to devote to saving her soul.”¹ 'Tis like an echo of the first chapter of the *Réflexions* :

¹ Mme de Sévigné speaks of a letter “which no one saw.” Does she mean the letter which had been left in the morning? Or was there another? (*Lettres de Mme de Sévigné*, v. II., Hachette édition.)

"Is it too much (my God) to redeem the scandal of a life in which I have done nothing but offend thee, to employ it now in thy service alone!" How like Louise de La Vallière that is, in its strength and in its weakness!

Listening to Bellefonds, the King wept again; but perhaps the emotion was purely physical, for his decision remained inflexible. Colbert, that inexorable slave of his, was now despatched to fetch Louise, with orders to use the Royal authority if necessary. But the forms were carefully observed. The Duchess was politely begged to return to Versailles, "so that he could speak to her in person." Louise obeyed, "on condition that the King would permit her to go back to the Convent if she insisted."

She had arrived at Sainte-Marie de Chaillot at six o'clock in the morning; she left it at six in the evening—twelve hours' interval!

Louis received her with an emotion which one would like to believe was sincere. He talked with her for an hour—and wept again, but with joy this time. Mme de Montespan ran to meet her friend, with open arms and streaming eyes. "She was crying—goodness knows why!" The Marquise had at first opposed her influence to Louise's return. She had even had "a great quarrel" with the King. But when she found herself defeated, our sly lady put the best face she could on it. Outside this little circle of interested persons, opinions were divided. Mme de Sévigné censured "all this irresolution," and the ever-changing latest intelligence, Mme de Scudéry, the widow of the author of *Alaric*, thought the King admirable "even in his faithlessness." "He shows courtesies to any one he has loved, which very few fine gentlemen would lavish on a lady of whom they had wearied, even if she had been as faithful as the

Duchess." According to La Grande Mademoiselle, "every one thought that La Vallière had behaved in a very silly way, for she ought either to have retired, or insisted on her conditions ; but instead, she came back like a fool. Although the King *did* weep, he would have been very glad to get rid of her afterwards."

But truth managed to make itself audible through all the chatter. Bussy, exiled though he was, saw clearly by the aid of his native malignity, and expressed what he saw in no ambiguous terms : "I maintain that it is only for his own purposes and policy that the King has brought back Mme de La Vallière. He needs a pretext for Mme de Montespan." Yes—such was the true motive of that "mysterious conduct." There was soon a glaring proof.

Louis XIV., like his grandfather, could make love, war, and politics at the same time. He was then preparing one of those military parades in which he so delighted. The Queen, the Princess, the Court, all were to follow him to Flanders. The Duchesse de La Vallière was invited. Despite the insinuations of all our spiteful clever women, Louise had only returned to Versailles because she was ordered to do so. Even her enemies agree in saying that her attitude was dignified and reserved. Impulsively she declined the invitation—forgetting that she was wanted not for her own sake, but for another's. Louis then commanded,¹ and again she was forced to obey.

In fact the King could not, without compromising himself, go familiarly to any one's apartments but hers—he must be supposed to be going "to the Ladies." But, with this precaution, no one had a word to say—

¹ See a Letter-Patent of May 19, 1671. "Having ordered our dear and well-beloved cousin, the Duchesse de La Vallière, to follow us on our journey. . ." See CLÉMENT, *Réflexions*, v. II. p. 215 : Pièces justificatives.

except the Queen, who had ceased to say anything. Intelligent Quartermasters had organised, had foreseen, everything. Louvois wrote to Robert, Steward of Dunkirk: "Mme la Duchesse de La Vallière will have the rooms marked 'Y.' A door must be made in the place marked 3 so that *she* can go privately into Mme de Montespan's room."¹ Thus were matters arranged. Louise's room was a sort of advance-post to her rival's. Is it surprising that she should have sighed for a humble convent-cell!

Louis did not really desire to torture his former mistress; it was only that he was afraid of Montespan. The terrible husband was still in revolt. He had even become more dangerous, and that was the result of a false move by Louvois.

Towards the end of the summer of 1669, some cavaliers at Ille in Roussillon had insulted the Under-bailiff of Perpignan. The affair was so unimportant that the steward had not thought it necessary to write to Paris about it. But Louvois got wind of it, and as these cavaliers belonged to the Marquis de Montespan's Company—he had then retired to his mountain fastness—it was thought to be a good opportunity for "paying out" their Captain. Louvois ordered an immediate inquiry into this serious matter, and told the steward to do everything he could "to implicate the Commandant of the Company and as many officers as he possibly could"—in fact, "to manage to frighten them thoroughly, so that most of them might desert, and especially the Captain, after which it ought to be easy enough to disband the Company." Above all, he was to try somehow or other to implicate the Captain in his report, so that he could be reduced to the ranks with

¹ This interesting document was published by M. C. ROUSSET, in his excellent *Histoire de Louvois*, v. I. p. 311. The original is in the War Office Archives.

some appearance of justice. . . "If you could arrange in some way to have him charged in such a manner that the Sovereign Council could pronounce sentence upon him, it would be a good thing." Louvois ended with two pregnant lines: "If you know anything at all of what is going on hereabouts, you will easily guess the reason." Then, prudent as always, he ordered the steward to return him this precious production—which the steward, after having taken a copy of it, duly did. Montespan, thus adroitly compromised, fled to Spain.

He was scarcely gone when, by one of those sudden flashes of insight—frequently the sequel of measures taken in anger—the situation was perceived to be very much worse, instead of better, than before. The husband could not now be spied upon—so was he not far more dangerous? Would it not have been better to keep him in France, within reach of the police? In short, the King and his mistress were more uneasy than ever. In July, 1670, to give Mme de Montespan a position as respectable as the irregularities of her life would permit, there had been presented at the Châtelet (it is easy to guess with what influence behind it!) an application for divorce.¹ But despite Royal influence, the appeal hung fire, was even "hung up."² And that was why the children were hidden away, and why, in case of a judicial inquiry, it was desired to conceal the errors of the shameless Montespan at the expense of the honour of La Vallière, forsaken and now repentant as she was. There is only

¹ GUY-PATIN, *Lettres*, v. III, p. 383. "The King has sent to the Châtelet an application for the divorce of M. and Mme de Montespan, *et alia multa de hoc genere dicuntur quæ scribere non est animus.*"

² No mention is made of it in the definitive judgment given in 1674. M. P. Clément thinks that the rigour shown by Louvois to Montespan was caused by the latter's resistance to the divorce. That is erroneous. The application was subsequent to Louvois' prosecution.

one mitigating circumstance in this tyrannical conduct of the King—and that is a certain respect for public morality. He himself wished to save appearances!

Louis XIV. permitted no gossip about his private life. He learnt that Mme de Heudicourt, ex-*demoiselle* de Pons—that unwilling virgin of 1661!—was telling outsiders all she knew of the secret life of Mme de Montespan and himself.¹ The “obstreperous” young woman was exiled; but the Court and the whole town of Paris could not very well be exiled too, and they were involuntary witnesses of the hitherto secret passion.

The Court left for Flanders. During the stay there, Louis frequently went up “to see the Ladies”—even on the day when a dispatch informed him that one of his sons, the Duc d’Anjou, was seriously ill. When Marie-Thérèse returned from a pilgrimage to a neighbouring Abbey, the King called to her from an open window, “Madame, we must set off to-morrow, so as to be near my son. The anxiety would be too great otherwise.” The anxious father was shouting from the window of Mme de Montespan’s room! A poor sort of husband, but an excellent parent, Louis was punished this time through his paternal feelings, for the news of the little Duke’s death (July 10, 1671) met the Royal family on their arrival.²

¹ See Mme DE CAYLUS, *Souvenirs*. SÉVIGNÉ, *Lettres*, v. II p. 54, Hachette edition. Mme de Maintenon, or rather Mme Scarron, affirmed it. “I could not possibly see any more of her without seriously injuring my reputation and my prospects” (*Correspondance générale*, v. I. p. 154). Though we cite this letter, we cannot refrain from making some remarks thereon. The original belongs to M. Bonhomme, who has published it (*Mme de Maintenon et sa famille*) without assigning to it any date. M. Lavallée, to the words *This Easter-Day*, has added the date, 1671—which seems a probable one, until we notice that he does not give the signature—*Maintenon*—which M. Bonhomme does give. Now, in 1671, there could have been no question of such a signature. I wish to warn the definitive editor of the *Lettres de Mme de Maintenon* of this difficulty.

² *Œuvres de Louis XIV.*, v. V. p. 482. M. Chéruel, in his notes on

Despite this lesson, Louis' life remained unaltered. The same sight was seen at Versailles, at Saint-Germain, at Fontainebleau: first, La Vallière would get into the Royal carriage, then the King, then the Montespan—all three on the same seat, with the King in the middle. A strange spectacle, truly! Louis, very well dressed in brown material of some sort, covered with gold lace; gold lace on the hat also, and a high colour in his face. Mme de Montespan, very handsome, with a blooming complexion. The Duchess herself, somewhat restored to health by the greater quietude of her life, had blossomed out again. For a long time her thinness had been the great topic—now every one professed astonishment at her relative stoutness, and she was pronounced to be “very pretty.” Louise, that Royal captive, that victim dragged at the chariot-wheels of a triumphant rival, now drove in this fashion through the fair woods where vows of eternal love had once been whispered in her ear. Was it to make up to her for this torture that Louis, at the end of the year, confirmed the provision made for the little Duc de Vermandois, Admiral of France since 1669? Favours were lavished on the Mortemarts—those indefatigable beggars—while they fell but reluctantly upon Louise and her son.

Death continued his solemn warning to the actors in this Royal comedy. Madame Henriette had been struck down in June, 1670; and now, in December, 1671, Mme de Montausier, who had been dying for three years, was at last carried off. One day, in a dark corridor of the Tuileries, a woman's face had eerily appeared to her . . . and from that hour she had drooped, had been soon obliged to relinquish her post—the post so ardently desired at one time! On

the *Mémoires de Mlle de Montpensier*, v. IV. p. 292, says that the Duc d'Anjou died on July 18.

December 2, Fléchier preached her funeral-sermon, and could not help saying : " I know that her life was regular . . . but did she avoid human weaknesses—those half-hearted strivings after good, those too-lax tolerances, connivances, which are the common temptations of mankind ? "

Louise de La Vallière knew those " connivances " too well ! She had profited by them, if we can call it profit ; and then her rival, Mme de Montespan, had enjoyed them in her turn. The orator added : " Therefore, despite all her known virtues, I should still fear for her did I not think that she had expiated her sins by a long penance . . . by humiliating and painful infirmities, by the abnegation of human joys and consolations, and by long, weary suffering. "

Less than three months later, Louise was present at the afflicting death-bed of little Marie-Thérèse of France. The " laws of society " had ordained that the Duchesse de La Vallière and Mme de Montespan should be by the baby's side, together with the distracted Queen, who—absorbed in her grief—forgot the insult of such companionship. And on the next day died the widow of Gaston d'Orléans, Madame-Dowager—she who had brought Louise to Paris.

As our *dénouement* draws on, all the *dramatis personæ* reappear, just as they do in a " well-made " play—and in April, 1672, we find Marie Mancini, Constableness Colonna, and her sister Hortense, Duchesse de Mazarin, landing on the coast of Provence, got up like veritable heroines of romance, with lots of jewellery and no underlinen. They were received with general disapproval—it was a unanimous *tolle* ; well-behaved ladies called down judgment on their giddy heads. Others were even more drastic. Mme de Bouillon and the Comtesse de Soissons declaimed loudly against " the mad fools "—their own sisters. But Marie

Mancini, daring as ever, advanced upon Paris all the same. Marie-Thérèse, then Regent, sent a *Lettre-de-Cachet* to await her arrival, containing orders to arrest her wherever she was encountered. When Louis was told of this stern measure, he answered simply "GOOD," and allowed his old love to be shut up in the Monastery of Lys, near Melun. But even that town was too near Paris and Fontainebleau; so, to prevent an irruption of the troublesome lady, she was ordered to withdraw to Reims. She then tried all her formerly successful methods: letters to the King—passionate, angry, disdainful, ironical. . . They failed now. "I could never have believed it if I had not seen it!" she cried. But, despite her audacity, she was discouraged; she submitted. Her last words reveal fully the mediocrity of her character. "At least," she demanded, "if they must exile me, let it be to an Abbey or a *beautiful* Convent."¹ It was in Spain, about 1710, that she ended an obscure and unrespected existence; but she may be said to have really died in 1672. *She died in prison, in 1710.*

There were little lessons—often more effective—as well as the great solemn warnings. In March, 1671, Louise was scarcely installed in her own abode—or the *Ladies' Abode*, as some put it—when Louis Guilhem de Castelnau, Comte de Clermont-Lodève, Marquis de Cessac, was discovered cheating at cards. He had given thirty *pistoles* to the Duchess's men-servants to throw the house-cards into the river and replace them with his own.² The King was very angry, and

¹ DEPPING, *Correspondance de Louis XIV.*, v. IV. p. 729. We refer the reader to the book by M. Chantelauze on Marie Mancini and Louis XIV., and also to that by Lucien Pérey, *Marie Mancini Colonna*.

² MME DE SÉVIGNÉ, *Lettres*, March 18, 1671, v. II. p. 113 (Hachette edition). Cessac came back in 1674, cheated again, was banished again, and again pardoned. He actually married a daughter of the Duc de Luyne.

ordered the Grand Provost to discover some means of preventing cheating at cards. The Grand Provost consulted Colbert, who consulted La Reynie, who could think of nothing, for he did not dare to suggest the dropping of cards altogether. Cessac wisely fled to England. . . . An incident which, certainly, might have happened in any one's house—but was particularly painful in this one, for it recalled the odious happenings at the little Hôtel Brion.

Then, another evening, there was another little thing. The King, when he was “with *the Ladies*,” behaved much as if he had been with men only, and talked in a free sort of fashion—telling, for instance, how Villarceaux, first the lover of Ninon, then the adorer of Mme Scarron, had asked for a post for his son. He had done it very cleverly—too cleverly! This excellent fellow, uncle of I know not whom, had heard that certain people “had been good enough to tell his niece that the King had designs upon her.” If that were true, he “now begged His Majesty to make use of him, for he could arrange the matter better than any one else.” The master had, quite sincerely, laughed at this Villarceaux. “We are too old to attack girls of fifteen,”¹ he said.

That was the answer of a sensible man ; but to tell the story before Louise, who had given him the flower of her youth, was not the action of a delicate-minded one.

¹ Mme DE SÉVIGNÉ, *Lettres*, Dec. 23, 1671, v. II. p. 439 (Hachette edition). This edition has: “And he told this story at the house of *some ladies*.” Read “*the Ladies*”: Mmes de La Vallière and Montespan.

CHAPTER VII

APRIL, 1672—OCTOBER, 1673

ABOUT April, 1672, Louise de La Vallière was momentarily freed from her chain. Mme de Montespan was *enceinte*. The King was about to join the Army. He dared not leave his mistress at Saint-Germain, exposed to her husband's violence ; and so Athénaïs was brought to a little secluded castle, called Le Genitoy.¹ This house belonged to a Sanguin, a Gentleman of the Chamber, collateral heir of a mistress of Francis I., the famous Anne de Pisseleu. Here Louis came secretly to bid his mistress farewell, leaving her under the protection of guards who were ordered to give no one access to the isolated abode.

Mme de Montespan had a companion there, but she was not La Vallière, whom they would not have dared to condemn to such imprisonment. Only a paid friend could be supposed to undergo so long a term of boredom—such as Mme Scarron, for instance. That insidious lady, who was gaining favour every day, had the knack of getting a great deal without asking much ; nor did any one surpass her in the assumption of an air of frank independence. On her holiday evenings, at Mme de Sévigné's, she talked admirably of the horrible restlessness of Court-

¹ Le Genitoy, Seine-et-Marne, parish of Bussy-Saint-Georges, to the south of Lagny. The Abbé Le Beuf has discovered that the old name of this demesne was Genestoy.

life, of the bitter vexations and dreary boredom of the *Ladies*—even that one who was most envied. It was delightful to listen to her. Her company was pronounced enchanting. At Genitoy she altered, not her manner, but her subject and the names of the “victims.”

And so Louise felt once more the long-lost joy of freedom. She profited by it to lead a quieter, more reflective life. It was more than two years now since religious ardour had re-awakened in her soul, like a line in an engraving which has been hidden under some accidental stain. And hope came back with faith. As to charity, Louise had never neglected that. On June 5, Bossuet preached on the duty of the rich towards the poor. Almost immediately, she wrote to M. de Ribeyre, Surveyor at Tours, “that she wanted to help the sick poor of the Duchy,” to diminish the taxes, to do good works throughout the parishes (July 8, 1672). And about this time, an honest friar, who came a-begging to her house, received a very considerable sum of money from her hand. Surprised at the amount, “Madame,” said he, “you are so charitable that God will surely have mercy on you. Put your trust in Him. One day you will know the greatness of His mercy.” In another version, the words differ a little: “Oh, madame, you will be saved. It is not possible that God should allow any one to perish who gives alms so liberally for love of Him.” A good soul and true, this poor friar who thanked a Duchess by promising her the Divine compassion! Far from offending Louise, the kindly words “gave her real joy,” and remained in her memory as a “happy omen.”

Just at this moment, the best adviser she could have had—Bellefonds—got into disgrace with the King. Strange, truly, are the happenings of this world.

Louis punishes his Marshal, and that Marshal becomes an influence in the conversion of his former mistress !

Gigault de Bellefonds, born in 1630, was in 1649 Governor of Valognes and its Castle. He defended them against the Fronde at the same time that Laurent de La Baume Le Blanc so valiantly kept Amboise for the Crown. Chief Royal Steward in 1663, Marshal of France in 1668, and long honoured with the King's friendship, he had of course met Louise de La Vallière frequently. Moreover, his wife, *née* Madeleine Foucquet, *dame* de l'Armor,¹ daughter of a leading Parliamentarian at Rennes, was a compatriot of the charming Gabrielle Glé de la Cotardais, sister-in-law of the quondam favourite.

Louise's sincerity, modesty, disinterestedness, and trustworthiness had long since won for her Bellefonds' esteem—and that was not given lightly. Misfortune breaks up false friendships, but cements true ones. It happened that the Marshal and the Duchess almost simultaneously realised the vanity of worldly success—and moreover, by a curious coincidence, the family of Mortemart seemed to be equally fatal to both. Bellefonds, who enjoyed well-deserved favour in 1668, suffered his first defeat when Mme de Montespan's influence obtained the Governorship of the Dauphin for Montausier. And, in the following year (June 1669), there came another disappointment. He wanted the Governorship of Paris. And it was Mme de Montespan's father, M. de Mortemart, who got it. In 1770, the King *did* send the Marshal with his condolences on the death of Madame to the King of England ; but that delicate mission could scarcely be regarded as a mark of great favour, for it had been

¹ The genealogists say "de la Remort" ; but this is erroneous. L'Armor is a hamlet in the parish of Pleubian, department Côtes-du-Nord.

tacitly agreed on both sides to preserve a discreet ambiguity.¹ Moreover, such embassies are short-lived. Bellefonds left on July 3, 1670, and was back again before the end of the month; and thenceforth his life was a series of odd contrasts. One day, he was seen with M. Le Grand, both riding on horses "as swift as lightning" for a stake of three thousand *pistoles*—about 150,000 francs in modern money. The next, came the news that he had gone to La Trappe, as a penitent in retreat under the direction of the Abbé de Rancé. And he came back converted.

The son of pious parents, the nephew of two aunts "in religion" (one a Benedictine, the other a Carmelite), and a pupil of the Christian poet Brébeuf,² Bellefonds was sincere in his penitent resolutions. He was the father of a handsome family, the master of a happy home, a man of irreproachable life, and—whatever he may have thought himself—the envied of many; and the only trouble he was known to have was that of debt. For, ambitious and proud, a lover of art and of adventure, he had long since outrun the constable, and was much worried about money-matters. Louis, to do him justice, treated him with delicate generosity, and freed him from his creditors. But the Marshal had lost his high spirits; he grumbled frequently, and—as invariably happens—all sorts of things offensive to his susceptibility now began to occur.

Louvois, the War-Minister, ordered Bellefonds and Créquy to serve under the command of a colleague, who was, like them, a Marshal of France—that is to

¹ See in *L'Histoire d'Angleterre*, by RAPIN-THOIRAS, 1728 edition, v. IX, p. 253, some curious details on this subject.

² HUET, *Commentarius de rebus ad se pertinentibus*. See on Brébeuf and his brothers an excellent book by M. CH. MARIE, *Notice sur les trois Brébeuf* (Paris, Douniol, 1785); and a more detailed account, *Essai sur la vie et les œuvres de Georges de Brébeuf*, by RENÉ HARMAND (Paris, 1897).

say, their equal in rank. This order seems quite natural now, for we know that their colleague was Turenne; but misanthropic Bellefonds regarded it as an attack on his prerogative. "He laid the matter before His Majesty, and won his cause like a brave gentleman." Next day he left for La Trappe, wishing, during Holy Week, to prepare himself for the dangers of the campaign. By the time he came back, Louvois, who was not addicted to going into retreat, had induced the King to change his mind. Louis enjoined Bellefonds to obey Turenne, and upon his refusal, banished him to Bourgueil (April, 1672).

It was this last blow which brought Bellefonds and Louise together. It will be remembered that when Louise, in February, 1671, fled to the Convent at Chaillot, she entrusted this friend with the task of explaining her motives to the King, and charged him to say "that after having given Louis her youth, the rest of her life was not too much to spend in saving her soul." If Bellefonds could, in 1671, have consulted his own inclinations, he would have left the Duchess in her convent; and now he had no hesitation in recommending her to seek that refuge again. Touchy though he might be, the Marshal was otherwise a sensible man. He in no wise undertook to direct her conscience, still less to find for her one of those counsellors whom she called "rose-water confessors." His clear-sighted friendship found the right man for her in the person of Father Cæsar, a bare-foot Carmelite.

Father Cæsar belonged to one of the best families in Vic, a little town in the Bishopric of Metz, and was called, "in the world," Jean Friche. Before preaching to others of perfection, he had worked hard to attain it himself, spending the greater part of the night in prayer, sleeping two hours at the most, sometimes not going

to bed at all. He had been appointed Prior of the Convent at Arras, which was a high honour in his Order ; then he retired to a place near Namur, where, in a monastery called the *Desert*, Carmelite monks led lives like those of the solitaries in the Primitive Church. He had a well-deserved reputation as an enlightened, charitable, and ardent director of souls, while at the same time he was discreet, and not too original or eccentric.¹

Father Cæsar was at one time the pet confessor of courtiers ; he used actually to succeed in getting them to restore money ! But from Louise de La Vallière, nothing of that sort could be obtained. His modesty and her humility have thrown a veil over this conversion, so that we know not precisely what his methods were with the penitent ; but he wore the habit of the Carmelites—and she became a Carmelite nun.

To the influence of Bellefonds and that of Father Cæsar, there was now added another, potent by the double force of spotless virtue and never-failing kindness of heart. Queen Marie-Thérèse, proud and high-minded, had never been able to accept the Court-code of morals, nor could she ever resist the proofs, or even the signs, of a genuine remorse. Those around her were very witty, but entirely ungenerous and unforgiving ; they had made public mock of the tender-hearted woman's jealousy, but

¹ *La Prière du pécheur pénitent, ou l'Esprit avec lequel il doit réciter l'Oraison dominicale*, by the REVEREND FATHER CÆSAR, Barefoot Carmelite (Georges et Louis Josse, Paris, 1690), with a Eulogy of the Reverend Father. See also *Journal des Sçavans*, 1690, v. XVIII. p. 575 (Amsterdam, 1691). The Bibliothèque Nationale does not possess the *Prière*, but it has the *Journée sainte, ou Méthode pour passer saintement la Journée*, etc., which is a collection of MSS. by Father Cæsar (Paris, 1692). This treatise is full of wisdom. Noticeable is the interdiction to penitents of the infliction upon themselves of physical mortifications, of the use of the hair-shirt, and of discipline, without their confessor's advice.

not one among them had noticed her charitable nature. Louise, however, had not—except when she was obliged—failed in respect towards the Queen. In her *Réflexions*, she speaks of the bitter remorse which poisoned the delights of her passion; and we are assured, on good authority, that she felt guilty not only before God, but also before that Queen whose happiness she was destroying. She felt this even at the time of her greatest joys; she was tormented, obsessed, by the remembrance of it when it came to her turn to experience the pain of desertion and the anguish of jealousy. She had no claim upon her faithless lover or against her crafty rival, and she realised then what torture she had inflicted on the lawful and loving spouse.¹ On the other hand, Marie-Thérèse, kind as she was, was not so stupid as people chose to believe. In 1666, after the death of Anne of Austria, believing, in her simplicity, that the King had broken with La Vallière, she had at once opened her door to the forsaken woman. The reader will recall her anger when she began to believe that she was being mystified. She took a long time to see the true state of affairs, but as soon as she realised that Louise had been thrown over for the Montespan, her heart ached afresh for her; she again took her under her wing—poor, penitent favourite, as miserable in her wrong-doing as the Queen in her utter fidelity to duty!

The year 1672 ended in comparative calm. The campaign of 1673—in which Louis XIV. was followed, by his own desire, by his Queen, his cast-off mistress, and his reigning favourite—showed the real state of

¹ "She would have wished to continue a frank friendship with a Sovereign who inevitably won all hearts. . . But it was wrong to endeavour to share a heart which the Sacrament of Marriage had consecrated wholly to a lawful wife" (*L'Illustre pénitente*, p. 36).

affairs. Marie-Thérèse installed herself at Tournai, and kept La Vallière with her. The Montespan and her "inseparable," Mme Scarron, shut themselves up at the farther end of the town, in the Citadel. Louise was more and more addicted to pious exercises. "She puts on an air of devotion," said La Grande Mademoiselle, who was there, and as rancorous as ever.¹ The "air" lasted for more than three years. Louise arranged her life in such a way that she could escape worldly distractions, could spend some time in thought and in prayer—and, under her fine clothes, she wore a hair-shirt. In her frank, natural fashion she wrote to Bellefonds, who had gone back to the Army and was at the Siege of Maestricht: "I very well remember our last talks, and am vain enough to tell you that I have profited by them, and that I really think I am doing wonders. I wish you could judge for yourself, for one often flatters one's-self unwittingly."² She dared not entrust the post or the ordinary couriers with her penitent confidences. Such means were far from safe, and it was not because of the Dutch that this was so. But shortly an incident of war made correspondence unnecessary.

On June 24, 1673, the King, uneasy at certain demonstrations of the enemy, sent Bellefonds at the head of 4,000 cavalry to protect the environs of Tournai. So now the Marshal could "judge for himself." And great "wonders" she *had* done, when he compared her life with that of Mme de Montespan, as he could not help doing. For in spite of their

¹ Mlle DE MONTPENSIER, v. IV. p. 357: "The Duchesse de La Vallière put on an air of devotion during this trip." The elderly damsel is all the less excusable for this phrase because she wrote her *Mémoires* after Louise had entered the Carmelite Convent.

² *Mémoires de la baronne d'Oberkirch*, v. II. p. 232. "She arranges her occupations, spends hours in prayer, avoids gaieties. . . She is all covered with a hair-shirt." See also *L'illustre pénitente*, pp. 40, 41.

repugnance the Duchess and the Marshal were obliged to visit, and, as was said then, "communicate" with the favourite.

What the Marquise was hiding in the Citadel of Tournai was another pregnancy. Life was so dull there that Mme Scarron, despite her firm intention of making her fortune, complained bitterly of "this boring fortress." The Court shortly received marching-orders for Amiens. The Queen started first. At Orchies, while she was at dinner, one of the Royal carriages went by at a gallop. Mme de Montespan was in it. Though it was French soil; and the Dutch were miles away, the carriage was escorted by some Guards, detailed from the Army; for at Orchies, as at Genitoy and Saint-Germain, the husband, that foe of one's own household, was the haunting terror!

The campaign ended in a trip to Alsace and Lorraine. Mme Scarron stayed in Paris, watching over the growing group of little unacknowledged adulterous children (July 22, 1673).¹ The Marquise de Montespan took the road again, and went back to Thionville to take her place in the Queen's carriage. Louis was more devoted than ever to the ambitious daughter of the House of Mortemart. From Nancy, he wrote to Colbert to hurry on the work in the apartments which she occupied at Saint-Germain. It was his writing, but her dictation. There she wanted an aviary, here a garden, everywhere flowers. 'Tis said that in the early days of her abandonment, Louise de La Vallière

¹ Mlle DE MONTPENSIER, v. IV. p. 343. In the *Œuvres de Louis XIV.* (v. V. p. 513) is quoted a letter from Metz, August 31, 1673, where the King tells Colbert to give the "letters which have no superscription" to the person "he spoke of on leaving." This letter is plainly a mere copy of that quoted by us under the date 1663, when Louis XIV. was at Marsal. Père Clément reproduces this error in *Madame de Montespan*, etc., p. 46. The text, which he gives again in his edition of the *Lettres, Instructions de Colbert* (v. VI. p. 209) is correct.

uttered some complaints before the Maréchal de Grammont. He was a good fellow, but a courtier first of all, and he told her that "when it had been her time to laugh, she ought to have made others laugh, if she wanted them to weep when she was weeping." Madame de Montespan, a very different sort of person, was now promising, demanding, giving. She was called "the Munificent Beauty"—munificent with the King's money, that was what she was! And by this means she made quantities of friends. That philosopher by compulsion, Bussy-Rabutin, suddenly remembered that he was related to one of her relations.¹ Mme de Grignan wrote perpetually to her mother to "get on good terms with the favourite's friends," and Mme de Sévigné, *faute de mieux*, made up to the "confidante," Mme Scarron, who alas! had no influence on her mistress. The Marquise was at the zenith of her power. Not only could she dismiss the Queen's Maids at her will, but she actually succeeded in suppressing them altogether as an institution—and so beheaded, at a single stroke, that charming Hydra-headed monster which was called the *Chambre des Filles*.

While the Montespan returned in triumph to Paris, the Duchesse de La Vallière, long since out of the running,² even in thought, also returned thither, but with the firm resolve to retire from the world. When

¹ *Correspondance*, Lalanne edition, v. I. p. 348. "Thianges is my own relation."

² We mention here, merely to prove that we have seen it, a letter from Bussy of Sep. 7, 1677—a very coarse production, in which he dares neither to accuse nor whitewash La Vallière. Bussy was a blackguard, very witty, but utterly heartless and insincere, cringing and scandal-mongering, and cynical to the core. (*Correspondance*, v. III. p. 352.) As an agreeable variety, we quote a few lines from the *Mémoires de Sourches*, v. I. p. 18 (Hachette edition), where it is said that "Louise was entirely charming, gentle, and engaging; she loved the King passionately, and thought only of pleasing him. She did not even look after her own interests—and she utterly neglected those of her family."

the blow of her disgrace had first fallen upon her, her wounded vanity had inspired her with the insane idea of being virtuous at Court. She now knew how fragile are such human resolutions, when unsanctioned from above.

CHAPTER VIII

OCTOBER, 1673—APRIL, 1674

GENEROUS hearts do not easily break the bonds which attach them to others, even when those others are egotistic and ungrateful. Before making up her mind, Louise pondered deeply on her duties—towards her family, her children, even towards the King.

To her family she owed little enough. Her mother, who seems to have been lacking in moral sense, had in the beginning scarcely blamed, if indeed she did not actually encourage, her error. The lady, however, would have liked to be the mother-in-law—legitimate and avowed—of a son-in-law less imposing than Louis XIV.

The romantic Catherine de Saint-Remi was now Madame de Hautefeuille. La Vallière arranged pensions for these two improvident women. Her brother had a fine position already; her sister-in-law was a favourite at Court. As to the King, he had now for long been nothing more than *the master* to her. Despite her wilful blindness, Louise had been obliged at last to realise the idol's feet of clay. He was no longer a god—he was but that type of idol! The woman knew she surpassed the man, the King, in delicacy of feeling; she loved him still, but the spell was broken. She had resolved to go, whatever it cost her, and she had also resolved to speak.

There was still a critical point, though. What was Louise's duty towards her children? If she regarded only their material welfare, they were better off than she was. Marie-Anne was by anticipation Duchesse de Vaujours. The little Duc de Vermandois had been tardily, but richly, provided for. Colbert was managing their affairs for them; Mme Colbert had the care of their personal well-being. Louise saw her son and daughter from time to time; but she had nothing to say to their education. All she could do was to give advice, and what advice could possibly be so effective as the example of a life of repentance? To rehabilitate herself would be to benefit her children incalculably.

Well, then, retreat resolved upon—where should she retire? La Grande Mademoiselle attributes to her the idea of going as *pensionnaire* to the Visitation at Chaillot. That was where Mlle de La Motte-Argencourt—victim of the Queen-mother's hasty wrath!—had been leading a quiet, but unfettered, existence since 1661. But Louise was too sincerely penitent to be content with half-measures. *She* was not looking for a convent where life was unchangingly delicate, where ambition was still at large, where luxury and beauty reigned beneath the habit of the nun: such retreats as suited the daughters of a Mortemart. In love, she had looked only for love; in remorseful penitence, she looked only for a cell, and for pardon.

She did hesitate, but it was between two such austere orders that her hesitation cannot be imputed to weakness. Sometimes she went to that Convent of the Capucines which has given its name to a boulevard of Paris. To this church it was that the body of the Comte de Guiche, who had died at Kreuznach, had just been brought. Every year of his exile had added

lustre to the fame of Armand de Guiche. He had in him the stuff of two brilliant men. Far more cultured than the average fine gentleman of his time, he had given proofs of political ability and tact; and in literary work, which he also modestly attempted, he showed an admirable sense of style. When Louis XIV pardoned him and he came back to France, he had seemed to lose at Court the moderation and tact which he had acquired in Holland; but then again he had covered himself with glory at the Passage of the Rhine, only to die soon afterwards—of exhaustion, some said; of poison, affirmed others. Whichever it was, he died like a brave soldier and a Christian, asking pardon of all whom he had offended.¹ Two of the four actors in that comedy of love and lies, begun in 1661, were now dead. Guiche had followed Madame; and La Vallière was soon to follow Guiche into a sort of voluntary death. It is easy enough to understand why she did not choose the Capucines for her retreat, closely connected with the Grammonts as it was.

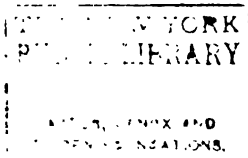
Sometimes, Louise went to the Carmelite nuns of the Grand Convent, in the Rue d'Enfer. She had been struck by the look of tranquil happiness on the faces of these holy women; and soon she was to notice—sadly enough!—a still more remarkable trait in their behaviour. Once, during a visit, before she had hinted in any way at her project, a friend of hers happened to mention that it was the Duchesse de La Vallière whom she had with her. The nuns at once

¹ *Gazette de France*, 1673, p. 1240. Guiche was buried in the chapel of Saint-Antony of Padua. In *L'Histoire de la guerre de Hollande*, v. I. p. 113 (1689), it is said that Guiche died of grief because he had been beaten in a skirmish. "Others believed he had been poisoned; for people will never allow that great gentlemen can die like ordinary folk." See also *Correspondance de Roger de Rabutin*, v. II. p. 321.



After a contemporary water-colour drawing.

THE CARMELITES OF THE RUE D'ENFER.



drew back. Far from resenting this, Louise respected them all the more for it ; and it was the principal reason which made her, in the end, select their convent for her retreat.

The Carmelite rule is scarcely known in our time, but at that time people were better acquainted with its peculiarities—its rigorous exercises, its continual mortifications, its painful fastings : a life, indeed, which is little more than a kind of death. Despite—or rather, by reason of, these austerities—the Carmelites inspired Mme de La Vallière with such respect that she did not venture to approach them directly, but sought a mediator in the request she wished to make of them. It happened that her friend, the Maréchal de Bellefonds, had an aunt who was a nun in the Great Convent. He succeeded in gaining her interest, and she was a woman of much ability, as well as piety. All this may seem astonishing, but readers must know that neither caprice nor worldly influence obtains the *entrée* to the Carmelites. Those who dream of brooding in a cloister because they happen to be satiated with “the world,” are quickly pointed elsewhere ; while to those whose conduct has been irregular, the door is closely shut. The Rule demands that postulants shall be of stainless morals, and untouched by scandal. And so there was long hesitation before they decided to receive the Duchesse de La Vallière ; but at last charity overcame too strict an observance of the ordinance, and towards the end of October, the Marshal was authorised to promise Louise her admission as a postulant. On November 2, Louise answered him : “You give me great joy when you assure me that I shall be received when I find I am able to tear myself away from here. It seems enough for the present.” Not that she was hesitating ; but she foresaw the thousand obstacles which would certainly arise. However, she went to

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thank the nuns, and came back more athirst for her freedom than ever. The practical good sense of the holy women, too, far from over-exciting her zeal, sought to modify and regulate it. Louise was unwell at the time, and she was advised not to make any decision until she was restored to health. She obeyed—and yearned for the unreserved giving of herself to God more than she had ever done before. She said, with her exquisite simplicity: “I feel, despite the magnitude of my offences—which I never forget—that love has more to do with my sacrifice than even my need to do penance.”

Characteristically, she told her plans to those best able to advise her. Life is full of strange paradoxes—and one of the men who most influenced Louise to enter upon the narrow path was the son of that very Saint-Aignan who in 1661 had helped to push her towards her ruin. The old Duke assuredly got no more venerable with age, and his two daughters, Abbesses against their will (and very indiscreet Abbesses into the bargain), were by this time notorious for their scandalous lives; but this second son—now the head of the family—actually showed real good qualities at Court! Saint-Aignan, Duc de Beauvilliers, was Colbert's son-in-law, so that he and Louise met quite naturally.¹ He was also the friend of Bellefonds, Fénelon, and Bossuet. This last, now the Dauphin's tutor, was unchanged from what he had been in the Advent of 1662: an able man and an inspired priest, he now received the confessions of the remorseful Louise. He marvelled at God's great mercy towards her; he urged her strongly to carry out her present idea, and

¹ See two articles by M. Giraud in the *Correspondant* for Jan. 25, and Feb. 25, 1877. *Madame de La Vallière, d'après des documents inédits*. M. Giraud has confused the Duc de Beauvilliers with his father, Saint-Aignan.

even prophesied that she would do so sooner than she then thought. But, satisfied with the state of mind he perceived in her, he judged it best not to persuade her to an effort which as yet she felt to be beyond her strength.

And in truth such prudence was very good for her. She had hardly returned from her visit to the Carmelites before all the world was talking of her retirement. Her friends and relatives hastened to deplore the project in the most moving terms they could command. But she was adamant. What would Mme de Montespan think and say, though? And what the King? The Duc de Beauvilliers, who could speak with authority, intimated to Bellefonds that it would be well to proceed with caution.¹ Bossuet had promised to arrange with the victorious mistress for the retirement of the forsaken one. He spoke as he felt, saying that no opposition could rightly be offered to this intention. The Montespan assuredly was not concerned for the fate of her rival—but what a terrible precedent it would be! She was afraid of the Carmelites—that was the truth; and, like all frightened folk, she dissimulated. True to herself, the daughter of the Mortemarts tried the trick of ridicule. Bossuet protested; the lady persisted, said the same thing over and over again, “with variations,” insisted on having the last word, in short, and answered the apostolic exhortations by sending Mme Scarron—most sage adviser!—to the Duchesse de La Vallière. That astute lady observed that there were “risks in a sudden change from the luxury of Court-life to the austerities

¹ See letters for December 20 and November 28, 1673 (also those for November 21 and December 10, same year) published in an article in the *Correspondant*, Feb. 25, 1877, *Madame de La Vallière et son temps*, by M. GIRAUD. The author of the article attributes them to the Duc de Saint-Aignan; but this is a palpable error, as we shall show further on.

of the cloister. Would it not be wiser to make a trial-trip, to enter the Convent only as a benefactress, until Mme la Duchesse saw whether she could observe the Rule or not? She could serve God in that way—as a secular nun, so to speak.”

Louise’s answer was very decisive. “Would *that* be a penance? Such a life is very pleasant. That is not what I want.” “But just look!” resumed the other. “There you are, all glittering with jewels—and in a few days, you are to be in a serge gown!”

Louise, to make an end, replied that for a long time she had been sleeping on the bare floor, wearing the hair-shirt, enduring all the austerities of the Carmelites.

Many years later (1703) Mme Scarron, then become Marquise de Maintenon, quoted these simple answers as a lovely sign of grace; but whether she then so well appreciated them may be questioned. There is an echo of the same worldly counsels in a letter from Mme de Sévigné, dated December 15, 1673: “Mme de La Vallière no longer talks of her retirement: she is satisfied with having mentioned it. Her maid implored her, on her knees, not to go into a convent. How could she possibly resist *that*?” At almost the same moment, the same lady—rather below her own level in cleverness, for once!—raved of the piety of “la Marans,” a sister of the Montalais damsel; and also spoke of Mme de Thianges, the too-notorious sister of the Montespan, as “being really exquisitely religious.” But though she might strive to turn Louise’s resolve into ridicule, Mme de Montespan, who was remarkably intelligent despite her wickedness, made no mistake with regard to its irrevocable nature. And the King was of the same opinion. Not that La Vallière or her friends dared speak to *him* of it; but Louis knew all, through other channels. He

could give no definite pronouncement, however, until his mind was set at rest about two dangers which even *his* omnipotence had not as yet removed : namely, the possible reclaiming of the wife by the injured husband, and of the children by their legally-attested father ! That odd, troublesome person, Montespan, could revenge himself terribly if he chose : he could find, claim, acknowledge the children of his Marquise. And to think of the Blood-Royal being subject to such a vengeance was nothing short of sacrilege ! Yet, to make the fearful possibility a reality, all that was necessary was an indiscretion from a person like the Heudicourt girl ! Louis resolved to "get the start of him"—to legitimate his adulterine children.

It was easy enough for the King to sign the Letters of Legitimation : had he not already done so ? Unfortunately, on this occasion, there was one great obstacle. To name the mother was to reveal the fact that the so-called "legitimated" children were already perfectly legitimate—for their legal father, Montespan, had not repudiated them ! And, consult precedents as one might, none could be found in which the mother was *not* mentioned. Henri IV., that champion legitimator, had always named the mothers. Not that that versatile King had not found himself in the same boat as his grandson now did : he had had to legitimate César de Vendôme and Antoine de Moret, the sons, respectively, of Gabrielle d'Estrées, wife of the *sieur* de Liancourt, and of Jacqueline de Bueil, who was married to the *sieur* de Harlay. But Henri, with a show of plausibility, had been able to say in his Letters-Patent : "We knew that the marriage was null and unconsummated, as is proved by the decree of separation and nullity of the said marriage which ensued." Now Mme de Montespan had had two children, by law two Montespan ; and no decree had

annulled *her* marriage. Hence the absolute impossibility of naming the mother. Oh, if La Vallière would only have——! But La Vallière did not carry complaisance so far as to let herself be declared the mother of the sons and daughters of her rival.

The King had long been worried by all this; and, at the beginning of 1673, the imminent arrival of another infant brought matters to a crisis. But a wonderful coincidence happened just then—Mme la Duchesse de Longueville, a penitent at Port-Royal, showed the way to legitimate the children of the Marquise, a hardened and notorious sinner!

The Comte de Saint-Pol, who was killed at the Passage of the Rhine, had, in his dying will and testament, implored his mother, Mme de Longueville, to obtain the legitimation of a natural child whom he mentioned by name. Its mother was a married woman whom rumour pronounced to be the Maréchale de la Ferté (yet another customer of the Voisin woman!). How had the Duchess been induced to yield to the desire of her son? No one knows; but, at any rate, Letters-Patent, dated September 7, 1673, declared the Chevalier d'Orléans to be the son of the Comte de Saint-Pol, without mentioning the mother. *Now* the same thing could be done for the unacknowledged children of Mme de Montespan.

Of the four who had been born, one—the eldest—was dead. There remained two boys: Louis-Auguste and Louis-César, and a little girl born on June 1, 1673, at Tournai. About the middle of December, everything seemed ready for the recognition, when somebody pointed out a serious omission. The means had been found for legitimating the children without naming the lady, but it was absolutely impossible to do it without naming the children themselves. Now the little girl, last of this unique, unmothered generation,

had not even a Christian name ! On December 18, accordingly, she was christened by a priest of Saint-Sulpice. The godfather, a little boy of barely three, had as proxy an ecclesiastic. The godmother was a great and beautiful lady. After the ceremony, it was necessary to draw up the certificate, in compliance with the Royal behest. At the beginning all went well : "On the eighteenth day of December was baptized Louise-Françoise, born the first day of June in the present year. . ." Born of whom ? Here came the first hitch ; a blank was left, and they continued : "The godfather, Louis-Auguste. . ." What is the godfather's family name ? Another hitch—another blank. "Having as his proxy *messire* Thomas Dandin, Priest ; the godmother, *dame* Louise-Françoise de La Baume Le Blanc, Duchesse de La Vallière." Thomas Dandin and the Duchess signed—and that was all. The difficulty of formulating certain things remained unaltered—and, to this very day, the deed is hidden beneath a band of paper which was then affixed to it. Louis-Auguste was the future Duc du Maine, and Louise's god-daughter was the Montespan's own child !

Two days later (December 20), the Parliament registered some deeds of legitimation which had a very short preamble : "Louis, by the Grace of God, etc. The natural love We bear to Our children, and many other reasons which considerably enhance Our sentiments, oblige Us to recognise Louis-Auguste, Louis-César, and Louise-Françoise." The first was made Duc du Maine ; the second, Comte de Vexin ; the third, Demoiselle de Nantes. The children had all that was necessary ; but for the mother—what a difference between these Letters and those of 1667, where the rare merits of the well-beloved Louise de La Vallière were so loudly proclaimed ! Haughty

Athénats had to be content with "many other reasons."

The Parliament registered, the Audit-Office approved, as in duty bound. Nobody suspected that the name of Louise-Françoise, born by the little Mlle de Nantes, had been given by Louise de La Vallière. What a supreme abnegation! The gentle-hearted woman had accepted, as her spiritual daughter, the child of the only man she had ever loved, and of the rival who had loaded her with insults. It was a good deal to have done, but not enough to gain her her liberty—for though the children's position was secure, their mother's was unchangingly precarious.

It was two years since, in 1671, the Royal omnipotence had been impotent to obtain a divorce. Now it was a case of necessity, and they turned to the Marquis. The proud, recalcitrant man yielded at last to his evil fate. His mother was dying; he wished to return to France and see her. Moreover, exile had finally ruined him. His estates had been seized and put up for sale, and his children—his real children—would soon be reduced to actual penury. The moment was therefore opportune,¹ for arranging a separation between the Marquise and her husband.²

¹ *Lettres inédites des Feuquières*, v. II. p. 436. These letters are most interesting, but the editing is very faulty. For instance, the letter whence we take this passage: "M. de Montespan's mother is dead; he is very seriously inclined just now"—one from Mme de Chaumont to Isaac de Feuquières, is dated "Paris, May 5, 1674." It is evident, by the text, that the right reading is not *Paris*, but *Pau*.

² As I have no further hope of being able to return to this portion of Mme de Montespan's history, I think it well to prove my assertions here and now. A letter (June 17, 1674) from Colbert to Louis XIV. shows that Montespan acquiesced in all that was done (P. CLÉMENT, *Madame de Montespan*, p. 223). Now Mme de Montespan had issued her writ on April 28, 1674 (P. CLÉMENT, *ibid.* p. 365). Assuredly the proceedings would never have been recommenced unless the Marquis's assent had been obtained, and that could not have taken less than a month, whether he was still in exile in Spain, or back

Montespan, now once more in mourning, and weary of the long intrigue, resigned himself and acquiesced in all that was demanded of him. The decree of divorce was pronounced.

It would seem that *now* no objection could possibly be made to letting Louise carry out her project—yet a mysterious silence was preserved on the subject ; and she, ultra-sensitive, fatigued, and depressed, began to suffer from that nervous disorder which then was called “ the vapours.” She hated herself for her weakness, yet she could not overcome it. Moreover, her worldly affairs were still very unsettled, and there was no one to help her to regulate them. Gradually she perceived that she would have to submit to the mortification of approaching, or, as she humbly expressed it, “ importuning the master.” Yet that master was acquainted with all her projects, embarrassments, and worries ; only, so long as he chose to leave them unspoken of, no one, not even Bossuet himself, dared to introduce the topic.

The great King, Louis XIV., laid much stress on the fact that only certain hours in his day were consecrated to gallantry, and, since these were wholly Mme de Montespan's, Louise and her plea were nothing but “ importunity,” indeed. Moreover, the selfish monarch was now dreading a more tragic desertion than that of a former mistress. Fortune herself seemed to be going to forsake him. The

in Béarn, with his dying mother. I may add that his attitude was entirely dignified. His only care was for the interests of his children, and on this point the King's agents were obliged to yield to him.

My young *confrères*, MM. Lemoine and Lichtenberger (*De La Vallière à Montespan*), making use of documents discovered by M. Paquier, Archivist of the Haute-Garonne, show Montespan in a less favourable light. They speak of him as a brutal type of man, and, worse, as a venal one. I believe that the Marquis's potential champion would find many an arguable point in the accusations which were trumped up against him ; and, to speak for myself, I find great difficulty in believing that it could ever be proved that Montespan took the first step.

campaign of 1673 had ended badly for him ; he was forced to abandon not only his Dutch conquests, but his allies as well. And, to fill up the cup, the General Officer entrusted with this gloomy and humiliating mission happened to be Bellefonds, the friend and mentor of La Vallière. He was not so wise as he was generous, for he actually ventured to tell the King what the King already knew too well—namely, that this desertion of his allies would be exploited by his enemies. A war—a long war, and bloody and surprising conquests—could alone restore his prestige and avenge his injured glory. Bellefonds was morally right, but tactically wrong ; he was recalled, and again disgraced. Thus Louise was more isolated than ever.

Nevertheless, the King had made up his mind that the Carnival of 1674 should be a brilliant one. The festivities began at Saint-Germain : there was a play and a grand opera every day, and a ball every week. And Louis, to give things a fillip, resumed his dancing. In the midst of this hollow gaiety, the Duchesse de La Vallière had to undergo a final trial.

Of Louise's two children, one, the little Admiral, aged six, was still in his governess's hands. But the other, Mlle de Blois, now just eight years old, and a precocious, well-grown, lively child, was already the admiration of her masters, especially her dancing-masters. While she was still in pinafores, it was arranged to introduce her to the great world. What mother could refuse herself the pleasure of admiring her daughter's first ball-dress, and watching her dance her first dance ! Louise beheld her little girl at Mme Colbert's, practising her steps, preparing her effects, enchanting Mme de Sévigné. On January 12, Marie-Anne, dressed in black velvet, and glittering with diamonds like a grown-up lady, entered the ball-



From the picture at Versailles described as Elizabeth of Bavaria.

LOUISE DE LA VALLIÈRE.



room. A Royalty almost as juvenile as herself, the Prince de Roche-Aymon, a Conti, was her partner. They might have been an engaged couple! On the 15th, in another gathering of little people, Mlle de Blois was declared to be a "*chef-d'œuvre*." On the 24th she had another triumph. Her début was the great event of that January.

Louise's friends were somewhat uneasy at this distraction. Bellefonds was worked upon to write to her. She replied at once: "You know I am emotional, and people are right when they say Mlle de Blois moved me deeply. I admit that I was delighted to see her looking so pretty. But, at the same time, I had my scruples. There! I confess all—but she will not change my purpose one iota. These are contradictory feelings, but I am saying just what I *do* feel." And, indeed, how could she have felt otherwise? Marie-Anne was so little *her* daughter! Louise called her "*Mademoiselle*," and the child answered with "*Belle-maman*" ("*Step-mamma*"). A still sadder little fact was that the small unconscious creature would smile at the Montespan, would exact praises from the tormentor of her mother: "Madame, you are not noticing your *friends* at all to-day." Every one marvelled at the child's "pretty little ways"!

Now that she had made up her mind to separate herself from them, Louise wanted to leave her son and daughter a *souvenir*.

She had already been painted with her two children. She is seated, dressed as a Duchess, with a wide blue mantle falling from her shoulders to her arms, and thence to her feet. On the left is Mlle de Blois, on her right the little boy, who is resting his head on his mother's lap.

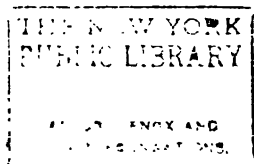
The sister is pointing to a little sword lying

on a cushion. Louise has her arm stretched towards a vase of flowers, and has taken one which seems to be falling to pieces in her hand. This picture has been the subject of curious identifications : it is shown at the castle of Eu, as representing the Princess Palatine and her children ; at Windsor Castle, as Henrietta of England, with her son and daughter. These false attributions have made its history somewhat obscure. Did it not satisfy Louise de La Vallière ? Was there thought to be something of ostentation in the ducal cloak ? At all events, she sat again for Mignard in the same attitude, but with a great modification as regards the children. The artist placed the Comte de Vermandois at her feet. The little Admiral, seated on a cushion, is holding a compass and taking measurements on a map where are figured France, Spain, and America. On the other side, Mlle de Blois, in a flowered gown, is standing with her elbows on a table ; her left hand is touching a vase of flowers ; with her right she points to some rose-leaves which have fallen on the table, and to two books. The Duchess is seated in an arm-chair ; her corsage is of white silk, lined with rose-colour ; there are gold trimmings and a sort of ladder of rubies ; the sleeves are full, with a circle on the middle arm ; the left inner sleeve puffs out from the cuff. Her hand is pointing to the ground, where lie a purse full of gold counters, some cards—with an ace of hearts showing—some jewels in an open casket, a mask, and a guitar : thus symbolising her disdain for play, for gauds, for disguises. . . The Duchess is leaning her right arm on the table, and holds between her fingers a rose, whence the petals are falling. Near these symbols of the past, lie two books which are symbols of the future : the *Imitation* and the *Rule of Saint Teresa*. At the base of a column



After the picture by P. Mignard, in the collection of the Marquise d'Ullmannson.

LA DUCHESSE DE LA VALLIÈRE AND HER CHILDREN.



is the inscription : *Sic transit gloria mundi*. Finally, these words are lettered on a sheet of music :

"Le monde étale en vain sa pompe et ses appas."

"J'escoute la voix qui m'appelle.
Que l'on méprise aisément
Pour jouir d'une gloire éternelle,
Celle qui passe en un moment,
Celle qui passe en un moment."¹

The verse is poor, but the sentiment is excellent. Louise was pursuing her aim, slowly but surely, unaffectedly, quite sincerely. She said every day that she was going to speak to the King, yet she did not speak. "*That* is my whole trouble," she wrote to Bellefonds. "Pray God to give me the strength to do it. To become a nun is nothing to me; to speak is terrible! I show you myself as I really am. Do not love me less, I beseech you." A keen observer, who saw her daily, said: "Her utter sincerity will accomplish all!"

And so it proved. Like the calmly-flowing tide, her gentle, inflexible will surmounted all the difficulties—and they were many and peculiar. Between the penitent and the Carmelites loomed her creditors! Louise herself admitted that she was a bad manager. Money ran through her eager fingers. She owed no less than 150,000 *livres*, and had nothing she could really call her own. Vaujours was a *majorat*. Her vows once made, Louise would be legally dead, and Vaujours would pass, scot and lot, to her daughter. Therefore she asked help from Colbert, who, watching his Royal Sphinx, made no reply. But at last the master spoke. He authorised the Comte de Vermandois,

¹ The poem whence these lines are taken has been set to music. My friend, M. Théodore Dubois, has been kind enough to have research made for this song in the Bibliothèque du Conservatoire. So far, it has not been found.

a child of six, to lend 150,000 *livres* to his mother, with the usual interest. All was now arranged ; and on March 19, Louise wrote to the friend whom she loved the best, because he was the sternest counsellor she had had : " At last I can leave the world behind ; I do it without regret, but not without pain." She added : " My weakness has held me back a long time, though I was an unwilling captive—or, to speak more plainly, a broken-hearted one. You know why, and you know how sensitive I am ; I am still the same in that way, as I realise afresh every day of my life—and I see, too, that the future would be no brighter than the past and the present have been. So you see that, as to the worldly side of it, I ought to be glad ; and if we speak of the Divine mercy, you know whether I am sensible of His abundant grace, and of my own unworthiness. I yearn to acknowledge both fully—to give myself absolutely to Him. . . They all go away at the end of April—and I also, but *I* am going along the Heavenly Path. May God grant me to advance in it—to obtain pardon for my sins. I feel so calm and gentle, yet so resolute, and even so hard (it may seem contradictory, but that *is* how I feel), that those who know me best are more and more amazed at God's mercy towards me . . . I am losing M. de Condom, for Mgr. le Dauphin is to travel for a while. I had asked him to preach the sermon on my taking the veil. If he is not back by the time I am considered fit to take it, I think I shall choose Père Bourdaloue. He preached a wonderful Passion-Sermon—it must have touched the hardest hearts. I talked with him a few days ago ; I like him extremely, and he is so penetrated with the truths he preaches, that it is a real spiritual joy to know him."

Although half a nun, Louise was still very woman. That is shown in the preceding passages, and those

which follow are quite as remarkable. "As for M. de Condom, he is admirable in every way. I shall not fail to persuade him to go on writing to you. And do you, on your side, exhort him to have as little as possible to do with dangerous people. You understand me. *His* intentions will always be absolutely pure, but only those who have the same can judge him aright. I speak like this because of his coming journey. You know that at Tournai he will necessarily have more of these relations than he would desire, and he ought to be on his guard. It is very presumptuous to give advice to a man like him; but people permit all sorts of things from one who is half a nun, and who hopes soon to be entirely one. I am very much obliged to M. de Grenoble for speaking to me as he has done; you know that frank plain-speaking does not offend nor frighten me, despite the weakness of my temperament—I wish I could be like you! Pray continue to give me your prayers and your counsel, and those of your friends; I shall try to profit by them, and I promise in return never to forget you before God."

This delicate feeling, this frank jealousy, give some idea of what La Vallière must have suffered during the long years in which the object of her one devotion had forced her to be the witness—nay, more! the blind—of his love for a rival.

While awaiting the realisation of the new pact between the Marquis de Montespan and the King, a last month of inaction was imposed upon Louise—a month at Versailles, in that Palace whose glories had once been offered her as a homage to her beauty, and close to that Pavilion in the Rue de la Pompe where her lover had vowed eternal love! Was there ever such a novitiate? . . . But at last all the opposition broke down, and liberty, that supreme test of vacillating

wills, found and left unshaken the resolution of the penitent woman.

"You know, O Lord," she had said, "you know what I am : the instability of my best impulses, the way in which worldly influences efface the impressions which your grace makes on my heart ; how prone I am to be absorbed in vain pleasures, trifles of every kind ; how flattery and worldly success turn my head and intoxicate me—in a word, O Lord, you know, much better than I know myself, how susceptible I am to evil, how vacillating in what is good—how utterly inconsistent towards you—and that is why, O Lord, being never sure of myself, my heart turns to you in the day of its affliction, in the day of its bitter need."

And God heard her prayer at last. The young, fair woman, scarcely thirty, full of vitality, of renewed beauty, now spoke with assurance of the very date when she would bury herself alive in the Carmelite Convent—and the coldest, hardest hearts were touched.¹

But it seemed to be written that no mortification should be spared to her sensitive and delicate soul. Colbert had got the money to pay her creditors ; but Louise, as we have said, had other obligations, and these, being entirely moral ones, were all the more pressing. First there was her mother, old Mme Saint-Remi, who would have liked so much to live with her daughter, provided that that daughter had, besides her title, an income and a husband—a husband who would make a more accessible son-in-law than the haughty King.² Then came her two sisters. One, Mme de

¹ "What could be more charming than to see you hold to your noble project in the midst of the Court-life? You allowed every one to speak to you about it, to mention the very day of its execution!" (FROMENTIÈRES, *Sermon pour la vêtue de Madame de La Vallière*).

² "The King neither liked nor respected her mother, and indeed she was scarcely ever allowed to visit La Vallière" (Mlle DE MONTPENSIER, v. IV. p. 358).

Hautefeuille, had more family than fortune. And there were several cousins besides, though these had not always been kind to her; and, last of all, there were some faithful servants. The King knew of her embarrassments in this direction, but he never alluded to them. Once more she was obliged to "importune the master." On April 18, she collected all her jewels, and sent them to him to be divided between her son and daughter. At the same time, she timidly submitted a list of the pensions she wished to arrange: 2,000 *écus* a year to her mother; 2,000 *livres* to her married sister; 100 *livres* to each of her servants. She also gave some souvenirs—rings, bracelets, and so on—to intimate friends. Louis authorised these liberalities by a word, written in his own hand.¹

On April 20, 1674, the Duchess began her farewell-visits. She made them very simply and with perfect dignity: it was like a Princess taking leave of a hospitable Court. The Court had its Sovereign. Louise de La Vallière, Duchesse de Vaujours, cousin of the King, mother of two of the King's children, must necessarily take leave of the King. . . Louis could not restrain his emotion. The spirit of sacrifice in others always touched him profoundly—egotist that he was! He wept. The woman showed herself stronger than the man. Dreading a futile return of tenderness, Louise bowed and withdrew. And this was the moment which the Duc de Montausier selected for saying to the Duchess that she was certainly showing a most

¹ Mlle DE MONTPENSIER, *Mémoires*, v. IV. p. 358. LETI, *Teatro Gallico*, v. II. p. 89, says that the King wrote her a note with his own hand: "*con biglietto di propria mano*." And although of the earlier history Leti is no very authentic chronicler, he is to be trusted here. Cf. what was said above of two orders given by Louis XIV. to the steward of the Comte de Vermandois, M. l'Abbé DUCLOS (*Mme de La Vallière*, v. II. p. 534). Letters-Patent of April 5, 1675, confirmed the pensions (P. ANSELME, v. V. p. 475).

edifying example, but ought to have shown it sooner!¹ It was this tactful, kindly person's own wife who, in 1664, at Vincennes, had thrust Louise, all hesitant and ashamed, into the apartments of the two offended Queens.

Of these Queens only one was now alive—Marie-Thérèse, who had long since forgiven. But Louise had not forgiven herself. She resolved to make her *apologia* before the whole Court. Montausier's rudeness had its pendant in a stupid speech by the Maréchale de la Motte. She was a big fat woman—a good mother, for in 1661 she had managed to save her daughter from the King; a bad aunt, for, two years later, she would not at all have objected to her niece becoming the favourite. She listened to Louise's *apologia*, "but," she observed, "it would have been better not to say that sort of thing before every one."

"My crimes were public," replied Louise; "my repentance must be public too." Then she flung herself at the Queen's feet, and that noble woman raised her, embraced her, and once more assured her of her forgiveness.

Mme de Montespan was disconcerted by the great emotional effect of these farewell visits.² She got hold of Louise and brought her to "her own house"—for there was no further talk of *The Ladies*. And it was there that Louise de La Vallière ate her last Court-

¹ LETI, *Teatro Gallico*, v. II. p. 90. "Madame, yours is the most edifying example that any one can possibly give the world, and I am amazed that so high-minded a lady should have been so long in deciding to do as you are doing." See, on the Duchess, the *Mémoires de René Rapin*, v. III. p. 430.

² "All these farewells bored Mme de Montespan considerably; and whether she feared that pity might re-awaken the King's love, or for some other reason, she was evidently very impatient that the Duchess should retire to her convent" (*Correspondance de Roger de Rabutin*, v. II. p. 344).

supper ; there, too, that Mademoiselle de Montpensier, unchangingly hostile, came to bid her good-bye "out of curiosity."

The next day,¹ the Duchess went to the King's Mass. He, as before, could not restrain his tears ; an hour later, his eyes were still red. On coming out of the Chapel, Louise got into a carriage. Her two children were with her. Friends and relatives followed in another carriage. . . Thirteen years earlier—day for day!—"little La Vallière," Maid-of-Honour, had set out, in innocent young gladness, for Fontainebleau ; and now she was going to a living grave. In 1674, as in 1661, the Court was assembled. They thronged round her carriage. She had put on a beautiful gown. She was scarcely thirty, and she was looking handsomer than ever. Tears and admiration conflicted in the watching faces. It might have been a funeral—or a triumphal progress ! Louise quitted the great world characteristically—with a gracious smile upon her face ; and the world has never forgotten it.

The heavy Convent-door closed upon her. Many people, hoping to frighten her off, had told her that she would be dazed when she heard that lugubrious shutting. But, on the contrary, she felt nothing but gladness. "My Mother," she said to the Reverend Mother Claire of the Holy Sacrament, then Prioress, "I have made a bad use of my will all my life ; but now I resign it into your hands for ever." They led her to the altar. She offered herself to God, and asked, as a favour, to be allowed to don the religious habit—wishing to anticipate, as far as possible, the vows which she might not yet pronounce. On the

¹ According to the *Gazette de France*, it was on April 19 that Mme de La Vallière entered the Carmelites. See year 1674, p. 520.

very night of her arrival, she cut off her hair. This essentially feminine sacrifice was almost immediately known to all Paris ; and when Paris knew that those golden locks had fallen on the flag-stones of a cell, there was no longer any doubt that La Vallière had shut herself up for ever.¹

Next day, the Court left for Franche-Comté. For the first few miles, they talked of the favourite's retirement. Ten miles farther on, it was forgotten. "After all," as La Grande Mademoiselle hinted, "she was not the first converted sinner." Louise's brother was with the Court, and Seignelay undertook to keep him amused. Louis was utterly devoted to the Montespan—utterly oblivious of the sincere, unmercenary woman who had lived for him alone.

¹ Circular letter from the Prioress of the Carmelites. See P. CLÉMENT, *Réflexions*, v. II. p. 129. Bussy-Rabutin knew of this, and, according to him, Louise cut off her hair with her own hands.

FOURTH PART

1674—1710

CHAPTER I

APRIL, 1674—JUNE, 1675

FROM the first day of her arrival at the Carmelites, Louise submitted to the Rule for the Vigils, for the vestment, for the footgear—that low footgear which was so painful to her delicate feet. The Sisters had supposed that it would take her some time to grow accustomed to their relatively coarse, and certainly frugal, nourishment; they had thought of accustoming her gradually to it, but, mistress of her body as well as of her mind, the penitent said she wished to live the life common to them all. One feeling inspired her, and one alone: *she felt so safe!* “I have been here two days,” she wrote to Bellefonds; “and I am so satisfied and so calm that I marvel at the goodness of God. My chains have been broken by His grace; and I shall strive to make my whole life pleasing to Him, if I can, so as to prove to Him my gratitude. I shall not enter into details to-day; you will be content with knowing I am safe.”

But it was a precarious safety. A word of Bossuet's shows us that despite the consent and the solemn leave-takings and the actual retirement, there was still some *arrière-pensée* in the master's mind and in the Montespan's. Louise's entrance at the Carmelites “had,” he says, “brought about quarrels. Souls cannot be saved from the world without tempests.” In society, it was the fashion still to disbelieve in the Duchess's definite retirement. Certainly, she

had had her hair cut off, but she had kept two lovely curls in front—and moreover she laughed and said witty things. “She declares that she is enchanted with her solitude,” wrote Mme de Sévigné (who was herself too witty that time!) “She thinks she’s in a desert, hanging on her convent-*grille*!”¹

Louise’s only reply to this chatter was to ask the Carmelites to shorten the Postulate, which usually lasted from three to six months. For in reality, she had been a postulant for three years. Nor is it needful to be long at the Carmelites to understand their mode of life. All the cells are alike. Those at the Convent in the Rue d’Enfer had been built on plans sent from Spain. Four bare walls, a door, a window. For furniture, a wooden bed shaped like a coffin, with a palliasse of coarse straw, roughly-quilted and hard, and serge coverings. Beside the bed, a straw-seated chair. As ornaments, a crucifix, and one or two images. The Rule forbids all personal possessions. And the same simplicity reigns in the Refectory: wooden spoons, earthen vessels, a little china jar. Food to match, always *maigre*: milk, cheese, vegetables—fish, as a rare treat. They rise early, at five o’clock in the morning; they retire late, at eleven o’clock; and all through the long day, Prioress, professed nuns, novices, postulants—each works hard. The last, who are spared in no wise, soon find out if the life suits them. All they have left to learn is to wear the habit; a serge under-garment, coarse cotton stockings, *alpar-gates*—which are a sort of low shoes made of cord, without any heels—a serge robe; on their heads, the band and the veil. As the Duchess had been authorised to wear the habit from the beginning, she knew the worst by the end of a week or two. She found straw chairs

¹ Possibly Louise was told to keep the two curls, in view of the ceremony of publicly cutting off her hair.

again, as in her garret at Reugny—and she found too, again, the innocence of her childhood's days.

Less than three months after her admission, she was permitted to choose her day for taking the veil. She chose the Eighth Sunday after Pentecost, when the Gospel appointed to be read is that of the shepherd bringing back the lost sheep on his shoulders. As was customary, a sermon was to be preached. Louise had asked first Bossuet, then Bourdaloue, to preach it. Both were prevented; and M. de Fromentières, Bishop-Designate of Aire, consented to take their place. He was a man of ripe judgment and very delicate feeling—a little cold, perhaps, and of an essentially melancholy disposition, which was a rare thing in those days. He was evidently attracted by his subject: the unusual conversion of a repentant great lady—still young and beautiful and reputed to be rich, who was immolating herself voluntarily in expiation of a single error, and one which the world not only pardoned, but excused. By a moving coincidence, showing the sympathy between their minds, he selected his text from the story of the Good Shepherd.

An immense concourse—for everybody who had not gone to Franche-Comté was there—filled the little Church of the Carmelites. In it were to be seen the young Mademoiselle, Mme de Longueville, Mme de Guise; and, close to these pious ladies, more worldly ones, Mesdames de Bouillon and de Meckelbourg. The postulant regains her full liberty at the ceremony of taking the veil. Louise once more put on a Court-dress—then came out from the cloister, and took her place in the choir, among her own people. The Abbé Pirot officiated. When the moment came, she went, taper in hand, to the “regular” door, where the nuns received her and led her, first to the choir, then to the altar-rails where she knelt down. The

officiating priest then asked her the following questions :

“What do you desire ?”

“The mercy of God, the poverty of the Order, and the company of the Sisters.”

“Do you come of your own free will and desire, to receive the habit of this Order? Have you made no binding promise of marriage? Have you no debts beyond your means? Have you the firm intention to persevere to the end of your life in this Religion?”

Only one of these questions could have embarrassed the novice—that about her debts. Without dwelling upon it, the Abbé Pirot pursued: “Do you then desire to enter this Religion for the love and fear of our Saviour alone?”

And Louise replied: “Yes, with the grace of God and the prayers of the Sisters.”

It was now the turn of Fromentières.¹ Never was sermon more in harmony with the circumstances. Even to-day, at two centuries' interval, one cannot read it without feeling that there was an electric current of sympathy between the preacher and the congregation—and without that, no discourse or sermon can be aught but a monotonous drone in drowsy ears. The Bishop did not flinch before his heroine—if that pagan word be permitted in such a connection. Of her he spoke as a glad missionary might speak of a convert; her he exhorted with all the authority of a Bishop. He declared to her insistently that the religious life is no asylum for weak souls, no refuge from the trials of existence. “Do not imagine that the

¹ The Formulary thus expresses it: “And then the preacher will tell her briefly what it means to live in obedience, chastity, and poverty.”

Manual of the Several Divine Offices for the use of the Nuns of the Order of Notre-Dame de Mont-Carmel (Paris, 1663), p. 153.

holy joy you now feel will remain unaltered. Pain, I am bound to tell you, will follow hard on this joy." Then, turning to those present, and speaking, indeed, for many who were absent as well, he added: "Grace to-day raises this soul to be a shining example for all its time; but if that time do not profit by it, that example may one day be its undoing, its eternal condemnation. If so great a mercy be vouchsafed us in vain, there is no hope of our salvation."¹

When the sermon was over, Louise de La Vallière received the habit, which had been blessed by the Archbishop of Paris; then, retiring with the nuns, she doffed for ever her ducal apparel, took the hair-shirt, the habit of coarse woollen stuff, put on her bare feet the cord *alpargates*, and came back to the chapel, where she received the girdle, the scapulary, and the cloak. Then the Prioress led her to the centre of the choir and made her prostrate herself, with her arms spread out to form a cross, upon a carpeting of coarse serge, and there she lay, prone, until the end of the ceremony, when, after having knelt and kissed the Altar, she embraced "devoutly and reverently" all the Sisters, beseeching them to pray God for her. After this, they all went out singing the Psalm *Lord, have mercy upon us (Deus misereatur nostri)*, and prostrated themselves before the Altar. She arose Sister Louise de la Miséricorde.

¹ Fromentières' sermon has been thoroughly studied in the work by the Abbé LA HARGOU, *Jean-Louis de Fromentières*, King's Preacher, p. 314 *et seq.* (Paris, 1892). The Bishop's family was related to that of the La Baume Le Blancs.

Several authors wax sentimental here over the fair hair falling beneath the Prioress's scissors. See P. CLÉMENT, *Réflexions*, Preface p. cxx.; M. l'Abbé DUCLOS, v. II. p. 532. Louise's hair could not have grown since April 20. She could only have had the two front curls. The same writers speak of the Princess Palatine's emotion when Louise was covered with the pall. That ceremony belongs to the Profession, not to the taking of the veil.

Does any one desire to know the effect of M. de Fromentières' daring sermon upon those whom he most wished to impress?

Some days after it had been preached, Marie-Thérèse and La Grande Mademoiselle, who had lingered a little, rejoined the King at Auxerre. All the news was discussed, and incidentally the Duchesse de La Vallière was spoken of as having taken the veil in a most edifying manner. Then Louis, adroitly evading the Queen's invitation to dinner, went off to his mistress. Very anxiously Marie-Thérèse said, "What! is he going back again without seeing me?" He came, however, about seven in the evening, stayed a moment, and then fled. . . 'Twas thus that Louise de La Vallière's example worked upon the King and Mme de Montespan.

Whatever the wits at Court might say and write, Louise, ever since her instalment at the Carmelites, had followed Saint Bernard's advice: "If you give yourself to God at all, give yourself wholly." She abandoned herself without reserve, and God accordingly made the greatest austerities of the religious life easy to her. The road was smoothing itself before her. She was of noble blood—and it stood her in good stead now; all her native simplicity and endurance re-awoke in her. She undertook, she asked for, the most menial tasks. She would sweep, wash the sacristy, hang out the washing in the barns on the coldest winter days, persuaded "that nothing was too humble for her to do." One day, when Marie-Thérèse was honouring the House in the Rue Saint-Jacques with a visit, it happened (according to a tradition of the Carmelite nuns) that Sister Louise de la Miséricorde was occupied in the lowly labours of the laundry, and that the Queen saw her pass, quite unaffectedly, with a basket

on her back.¹ These strenuous tasks produced a single reflection from Louise: "One can hardly pray to God at all!" But, in reality, she only prayed the better. So great was her impulse to humiliate herself that she asked to be allowed to make her profession as a mere lay-sister; but Mother Agnès de Jésus-Maria, with her great common-sense, forbade this excess of humility.

During the year of her novitiate, Louise wrote often to Bellefonds, who was in disgrace again. She always looked upon him as the "guide who had led her back to the Saviour's arms." "The Court has been near us again," she told him in July, 1674, "and I thank God I have left it for ever. I hear talk of endless pleasures, and the only ones that signify to me are those which I can enjoy in the Lord's House, and at the foot of His Altars. When I do not suffer pain, I am calm; and when I do, I am ravishingly happy. . . You know that I used to be very different. No one knows better than you, for I have had no secrets from you, this many and many a year." Sometimes she had visitors—unexpected ones. Once, before going to the parlour, "I am going before the Lord," she wrote to her friend, "to beg Him to keep me safe; and when I return, I shall thank Him for having drawn me out of the circle of those who offend Him and placed me amongst those who think of His service alone." Not that she was growing narrow, not that she was asking from the cloister merely a refuge from the emotions and the duties of life. "I wish, with all my heart, that all those persons would come, for their own well-being, into this Holy House—but the hour is not yet come. I pray God every moment to show them the grace He has shown me, and there is no penance I would not

¹ Abbé DUCLOS, *Madame de La Vallière*, etc., II. p. 596, 2nd edition. According to the tradition, Louise was still a novice at the time.

willingly undertake, if He would permit me, for the accomplishment of this end."

But if certain visits troubled the nun's mind, others fortified it. Gaston's former Almoner, the worldly Abbé whom Louise had seen at Blois—M. de Rancé—had entered upon the narrow path of repentance at the same moment as herself; and now, after a separation of sixteen years, they met again in the parlour of the Carmelite Convent, where Rancé, on his rare absences from La Trappe, loved to spend an hour or two. Louise was, as it were, one of his novices. She was very grateful for his teaching, and told Bellefonds of the joy it gave her, in a letter which is full of exquisite passages.

According to the Rule, the novitiate lasted a year. Louise had taken the veil on June 2, 1674. On June 3, 1675, she made the further vows. Her own impatience was the reason why not a day was lost. There was no further resentment or difficulty of any kind with regard to the reception of the King's mistress at the Carmelite House. Times were changed. Perhaps it has not until now been clearly realised amid what a general sense of spiritual renovation and looking-forward that memorable profession of hers was accomplished.

Almost simultaneously—that is to say in the June and July of 1674—Louise had chosen, and the Marquis de Montespan had been compelled by the law, to leave the King and haughty Athénats in a state of complete independence. The first impression of the lovers was, as always, very agreeable; and, as always, entire liberty had its inevitable effect upon passion—and that soon.

La Vallière's ex-friend, who knew by personal

experience how a favourite may be supplanted and had now lost the interesting spectacle of her victim's sufferings, took it into her head to think that her present ally, Mme Scarron, was inclined to be intrusive. She was too proud to treat a mere *servante* as a rival, yet too observant not to be alarmed ; and so she began the Ladies' Battle by showing caprice and "temper." So long as only Louise had suffered from this kind of thing, Mme Scarron had thought it quite natural. Now that herself was the victim, she found it intolerable. Hence furtive protestations, which only ambition sufficed to stifle in any degree. And, finally, the common master decided to give his children's governess the money necessary for the purchase of an estate, and a lordly title therewith. The poet's widow was turned into Mme de Maintenon ! She felt herself capable—so she said with her own lips—"of the *greatest complaisance* where the King was concerned."

We must remember that Louis XIV. wanted from his mistresses the distractions, not the occupations, of his life. He had many serious matters to think of. Drawn further and further into wide-reaching military schemes, attacked by a coalition, abandoned by his allies, and obliged, for the first time in his experience, to beat a retreat—he was feeling profoundly humiliated. . . And just then something happened, which every one knows of as an actual occurrence, but of which very few understand the cause—something which excited the admiration of some, the scepticism of others, the stupefaction of all.

During the Holy Week of 1675—from April 8 to 14—there was a blazing public rupture between the King and Mme de Montespan. The lady retired first to Paris, then to Maintenon. For a whole month, from April 14 to May 11, Louis scarcely saw

any one but Bossuet, who would go, in the evenings, disguised in a grey cloak, to see the favourite. She was first annoyed, then exasperated, then—resigned. The general opinion seemed to resolve itself into a belief that the King and his mistress were more in love than ever, but that reason and duty had led them at last to submit to the laws of man and of God. There is no doubt that Louise, whom Bossuet also visited, heard of this marvellous conversion. One of her letters contains a supreme invocation for “a much-loved object.” “In obedience to your wish, I have spoken to N—— in tolerably forcible terms. . . How happy I should be if, through all my bodily and spiritual sufferings, I could win the conversion of some soul! I ask it ardently of God, and I will confess to you that I can never think of it without rapture. I understand now that passage in the Great Apostle’s writings which I used to find so incomprehensible, where he asks to be *anathema* for the sake of his brothers. Yes, my God, I implore it of you with my whole heart. . . Let us pray pitifully for those whom we have so deeply loved.”¹

Now, who could be so dear to Louise that she should offer herself to be *anathema* for the sake of that other’s salvation? Whom but the King could she and Bellefonds both have loved? The sweet woman longed to see the blessed balm of mercy showered on those who were still outside the asylum which she had found. And indeed everything seemed to point to the Royal sinner’s sincerity, and to a lasting resolution to lead a regular life. On the day of Pentecost, the King, at the Camp of Latines,² and Mme de Montespan, at Versailles, publicly communicated.

On the following Tuesday, there was another crowded

¹ Letter XXI. N. must mean Mme de Montespan.

² On June 2, the King heard Mass and made “his devotions,”

congregation at the little church of the Carmelite nuns. Monsieur was seen there, and Madame and Mademoiselle (the daughter of Henriette d'Orléans) ; La Grande Mademoiselle, too, and Mme de Guise, the Duchesse de Longueville, Mme de Scudéry—the whole Court, in fact. The Queen had taken her place in the nuns' gallery, and beside her was Louise de la Miséricorde, who had made her final vows the night before. To-day's ceremony was that of giving her the black veil of the professed nuns. The service began. Mass was said by the Superior of the Carmelites, Abbé Pirot. Then Bossuet went into the pulpit. His first words arrested attention :

Et dixit qui sedebat in throno : Ecce nova facio omnia (*Apoc.*, xxi. 5). "And He that sat upon the throne said : Behold, I make all things new." The orator had been thinking only of La Vallière when he chose that text. "God," he said to Mother Agnès, "has done wonderful things with that heart ; truly, all *is* new, and I am more than ever persuaded of the application of my text."¹ The amazing conversion of the King and of Mme de Montespan had suddenly extended that application ; and thus, glorying in the power to speak, he addressed to the Queen, glorying to listen, that magnificent exordium in which he celebrates the wonderful, widening renovation.

"Madame, it will be indeed a glorious sight when He who is seated upon the throne, He who need but speak and all is done according to His Will, shall

Gazette, 1675, No. 57, p. 408. This expression is not very clear. Cf. *Gazette*, 1675, No. 39, p. 284, where the King's "devotions" at Easter are mentioned. But PELLISSON'S *Lettres historiques* leave no room for doubt. On June 2, the King communicated.

¹ Letter from Bossuet to Mother Agnès de Bellefonds, March 19, 1675, *Œuvres*, v. XI, p. 26. The original of this letter belongs to the Convent of the Carmelite nuns in the Rue d'Enfer.

pronounce from that Great Throne of all the ages that He maketh all things new—and behold! a new world shall spring up for His Elect! But when, to prepare us for these great renovations, He works secretly in human hearts through the agency of His Holy Spirit—when He changes them, renews them, stirs them to their depths, and thus inspires them with hitherto unknown impulses . . . is such a change less striking, or less wonderful? Oh, Christian souls, what is there more marvellous than changes such as these! What have we seen? and what do we now see? What a state—and yet again, what a state! I need not speak of it; the thing speaks for itself.”¹ And he added: “We must all wonder at these great God-given changes. Nothing is the same as before; all is changed that we can see, and what we cannot see is newer still—and I, to celebrate these holy new things, break a silence of many years, I speak in the pulpit which long has ceased to know my voice.”² Then, indicating plainly that his discourse was meant for absent ears as well: “My sister, from among the things I have to say to you, you will know how to choose those which are wholly your own. And you, ye other Christian souls—choose also!”

Continuing, he described the wanderings of a soul forgetful of its Creator, and wholly self-absorbed. He showed that soul led astray by beauty, “captivated by a flower which the sun can wither, by a vapour which the breeze can dissipate”—“the slave of pleasure, of the senses, of worldly joys, and possessed by that

¹ “Déforis published this discourse from the original notes, and as there is not one single variation, the ‘notes’ were evidently very full” (GAZIER, *Choix de sermons*, p. 475). The Abbé Le Barcq speaks of a manuscript in the Floquet collection (p. 264), but it appears to present no points of novelty.

² “Of many years.” Must we not read: “of three years”? Bossuet had preached in June, 1672.

dark and sinister passion, avarice—as cruel as it is insatiable.”

Then, passing from these passions to the analysis of nobler, more generous ambitions : “ Ah, behold,” he cried, “ all that glory can do for the soul ! There is nothing so glittering as glory, nothing so acclaimed by our fellow-men, yet what else is so miserable and so paltry ? If we would know this, let us consider its most magnificent manifestation—that of conquerors ; let us choose the most illustrious of them all—Alexander ! Alexander shall prove to us the poverty of victorious Kings. What did he long for, what did he suffer so cruelly—and make others suffer so cruelly—to attain ? His desire was to make a noise in the world, during his life and after his death. And he had all that he desired. No man ever did what he did : in Egypt, Persia, India, all over the world, in the East and in the West. For more than two thousand years Alexander’s name has been supreme. He lives on all men’s lips ; through the ages his glory has endured, without effacement or diminution. Praise he has not wanted—but how much else he wanted ! He had his desire—was he happy ? He was tormented by ambition during his life, and now he is tormented in hell, where he works out the eternal punishment inflicted on one who makes himself a God, who wishes to be worshipped as a God—what boots it whether it be through pride, or through policy ? And thus it is with all his kind. Those who desire glory, often are given their heart’s desire. ‘ They have had their reward,’ said the Son of God, ‘ they are paid according to their deserts.’ ‘ Those great men,’ said Saint Augustine, ‘ so famous among the Gentiles and, I will add, too much esteemed among us Christians, have had what they wanted. *Perceperunt mercedem suam vani, vanam.*’ ”

The echo of these words must have reached the

Royal Camp. Moreover, what Bossuet preached with the burning eloquence of inspiration, he had said in simple, but not less forcible and touching words, to Louis some days before. "The world talks incessantly of the magnificence of your troops and of all they can accomplish under such a leader; while I, Sire, ponder secretly upon a much more difficult victory. Meditate, Sire, on this word spoken by the Son of God—it seems to have been spoken for great Kings and Conquerors. 'What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul? and what shall a man take in exchange for his soul?' How will it help you, Sire, to be apparently victorious, if in reality you are vanquished and in bondage? Pray to God that He may set you free. I pray for it incessantly, with my whole heart."¹

Thus the great Bishop, when he spoke daringly in public, felt all the more confidence because his private speech had been no less frank. Yet the ladies—even those who, like Mme de Sévigné, did not hear it—thought his sermon less inspired than might have been expected. They maintained that he had been taken in by mere play-acting from the King and Mme de Montespan. If the desire for better things be an illusion, then Bossuet was under an illusion. But who knew better than he the fragility and inconsequence of human resolutions? That very day of Louise de La Vallière's profession, he spoke to his present and his absent hearers, and said: "I preach to you the most momentous truths of religion: what good will it do?

¹ Letter from Bossuet to the King, *Œuvres*, v. XI. p. 29. P. CLÉMENT, *Madame de Montespan*, p. 229, dates it July, 1675. The letter is certainly of May, 1675, because it was written several days before Pentecost, which fell on June 2 that year, and could not in any case fall in July. The later editors of Bossuet have not made this mistake, but they have erroneously numbered this letter XLV., following XLIV., which is dated June 20, 1675.

Oh, God ! what is man ? Is he a marvel ? is he a monstrous mixture of incompatibilities ? or is he an insoluble enigma ? . . . ” What great lady—even though she were a Montespan !—could deceive that vivisectionist of the human heart ? “ You will find in your heart a secret pride which makes you disdain all that is said to you, and all wise counsellings ; you will find a spirit of frivolous mockery, born in the gay moments of worldly intercourse. Whoever is possessed by it, looks upon life as a mere pastime—wishes only to be amused, and sees the face of reason, if I may so express myself, as a dull, gloomy, unattractive thing.”

Madame de La Vallière, or rather Sister Louise de la Miséricorde, is little prominent in this sermon, where one would have looked to find her eulogy. She was none the less present to the preacher’s mind, and the praise, though indirect, was perhaps all the more delicate : “ My sister,” he had said, “ you will know how to choose what is your own ” ; and, in effect, despite her humility, the nun must have recognised herself in that picture of the soul to “ whom God speaks, when He wishes, through all the tumult of the world, through all its splendour, all its pomp.” First of all, such a soul rejects the world’s riches—smallest of all sacrifices to a generous nature like that of Louise. Then, more reluctantly, the beloved jewels are resigned. “ But will she dare to attack her tender, cherished body ? Will she not spare her delicate complexion ? On the contrary, the soul is but the more ardent to attack such dangerous tempters. She gives her body distasteful food, and, that nature be the more easily subdued, she waits to eat until the pangs of real hunger assail her. That tender body lies on the bare floor.” Finally, the soul, “ led astray by liberty ill-used, is urged to control itself—and lo ! everywhere, the terrible iron bars, the profound isolation, the im-

penetrable seclusion, utter obedience—every action regulated, every step counted ! ” “ My Mother,” the Duchesse de La Vallière had already said, “ I have made a bad use of my will all my life, but now I am going to resign it into your hands for ever.”

The whole admirable sermon ought to be transcribed. There is not one phrase of mere rhetoric ; every word is full of significance. Amazing ! that the only authentic accounts we have of its effect, far from expressing enthusiasm, express disappointment.¹ Such judgments injure only those who utter them. The peroration alone leaves something to be desired. But what did so fine a discourse want with a peroration ? Bossuet had spoken deep truths ; Louise showed the application of them.

But, whatever may have been said, the assembly was still under the spell of that great orator, when the penitent woman came down from the Nuns' Gallery. “ She did that—the beautiful, brave creature !—as nobly and charmingly as she had done everything, all her life through.” It is Mme de Sévigné, restored to her real and better self, who writes those words. People thought that a year of austere, cloistered life would have altered her looks ; but, on the contrary, her beauty, now seen for the last time, surprised the whole Court. The black veil, blessed by the Bishop, presented by Queen Marie-Thérèse, and placed on her head by the Prioress, covered the sweet face for ever.² At this moment in the ceremony, the Mother-

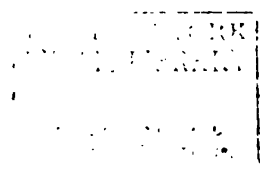
¹ BAYLE, Letter of June 24, 1675. “ He merely spoilt the ideas which the Bishop of Aire had expressed the year before.” Utterly inaccurate, this. We must remember that Bayle was a Protestant, and that Bossuet had written the *Exposition de la doctrine catholique*. See FLOQUET, *Bossuet, précepteur du dauphin*, p. 481.

² The Abbé Le Queux, and many others before and after him, have said that La Vallière received the veil from the Queen's hands. M. Floquet refutes the error. Shortly before 1675, the *Gazette de*



After a painting in the collection of Comte F. de la Roche.

SISTER LOUISE DE LA MISÉRICORDE.



Prioress takes the new-made nun by the hand. She leads her to a sort of little garden, marked out in the centre of the Nuns' Choir. There, among flowers which seem to grow around the edge of a tomb, she lies down on the ground, her arms spread out like a cross upon the carpeting of coarse serge. At this symbol of dissolution, the assembled multitude shuddered; many could not restrain their tears.¹ Then she who was dead to the world, arose—alive in God.

France had announced a veil-giving by a Princess. This was corrected in the following number. Finally, the *Gazette* said definitely that the veil was given by the Archbishop (see *Gazette*, 1675, p. 408).

¹ *Correspondance complète de la Princesse Palatine*, v. II. p. 119. The *Manuel* (p. 178) thus terminates the formulary for taking the veil: "If the father or mother of the novice is in the church, the Prioress shall lead her to the railing to receive their blessing." The *Gazette de France* (year 1675, p. 408), does not say that Mme de Saint-Remi was present.

CHAPTER II

1675—1685

SISTER LOUISE passed the first days of her profession in devout meditation. When she was allowed to resume her relations with the world, she wrote a touching letter to her friend the Maréchal de Bellefonds : " It is now that I can truly say I belong to God for ever. I am attached by bonds so strong that nothing can break them, bound by my vows, and still more by the grace which has made me take them. My only remaining desire is to lose the memory of all which is not God. Through His goodness, my heart is detached and my will aims only at pleasing Him ; but wearisome memories, from which I long to be fully freed, distract me in spite of myself. They alone remain to be destroyed." Alas ! one does not forget at one's pleasure. Louise knew only too well by experience this obsession by " a haunting idea. Thinking that one must forget—one remembers." But she accepted the irksome revocations by way of penance. " It is the hardest we can do. To love God ardently and forget all the rest—ah ! Monsieur le Maréchal, it would be too pleasant. I must bear the penalty of my sins."

To deaden remembrance, she wearied out her body, fasted on bread and water, wore a hair-shirt and iron belts, while iron bracelets replaced gold rings and jewelled ornaments.

Mother Agnès, whilst admiring this zeal, moderated it for fear of its loss through sheer ardour. Sensible and prudent as she was, she had not allowed the Duchess to become a simple lay-sister ; but she now permitted Sister Louise to help the white-veiled sisters in the most laborious housework.¹ Laundry-work, sweeping, washing-up, not for a day only, not for a week—but until the good pleasure of the Prioress should relieve them from duty. In these occupations and in this fatigue our penitent found the surest remedy for the much-dreaded evil of unwilling revocation of the past. By degrees calm was restored to her mind, and with calm, gaiety—that “gay temper” which “seems essential to the making of a perfect Carmelite.”² Soon she spoke only of “tramping gaily to the Heavenly Country.” A year after her vows, she wrote to her friend : “I am so absolutely tranquil about all that may happen that I look upon health, illness, rest, work, joy, and trouble, in the same light. I close my eyes and let obedience guide me.”

Moreover, she preserved in the cloister her pleasant humour, a distinctive feature of her temper in the world. Bellefonds, having sold his office at Court, entrusted to her the management of a business interest. She replied that she would try to give him satisfaction. “But,” added she, “I shall have the help of some prudent and adroit Carmelite ; for you and I do not make a sensible couple. Forgive me for thus comparing you to a person whose reputation is as bad in this as in other things.”

¹ Circular letter, pp. 172-174. See in chap. vii. of St. Teresa's *Histoire des fondations* what she says of melancholy types : “The most sovereign remedy is to employ them in domestic duties, so that the imagination has no time to work” (*Œuvres de sainte Thérèse*, v. II. p. 608. Paris, 1667).

² MSS. des Dames Carmélites, *Fondations*, p. 243. The phrase comes from Mère Anne de Jésus.

Her ready wit never deserted her. Towards April, 1676, the Queen, good-hearted to the point of blindness, twice brought Mme de Montespan to see her. Believing that the Marquise was now simply the King's friend, Marie-Thérèse hoped that the sight of Sister Louise's penitence would end by converting this other sinner. But *Quanto* (as the favourite was called) was hardly inside the Convent before, unalterably fantastic, she took it into her head to organise a raffle. It was great fun for the community. At the same time she had the impertinence to subject her former victim to a kind of cross-examination: "When all was said and done, was she as happy as they said she was?" "No," replied Louise, "I am not happy, but I am contented." Disconcerted, the Montespan stupidly asked if she did not want a word said for her to the King. "Anything you like to say, Madame, anything you like!" "Put into that," says a contemporary woman-writer, "all the grace, wit, and modesty imaginable." Our Marquise, feeling herself defeated, rushed to the kitchen and concocted a sauce said to have cost four pistoles. Moreover, she consumed it with "wonderful appetite." If Sister Louise did not feel, on that day, a profound conviction of her superiority to her ex-rival, it was because the woman was quite dead within her.

Each day hastened the quick reversal of mundane things: 'twas like that admonition already given to the Duchess before she had thought of quitting the world. She had seen Mme Henriette, the Comte de Guiche, Mme de Montausier, die; she had seen Marie Mancini and her sister Hortense reduced to the position of adventuresses. . . Before her defiled the further procession. Marguerite d'Orléans, that friend of her childhood,

whose romantic notions had so fired her youthful imagination—Marguerite, escaping from a husband who was glad to get rid of her, came to pay Louise a visit which lasted some hours, and (amazing!) she too was in a convent now; she was at Montmartre. There, in a sort of captivity, she was housed; and when she did have an "outing," her sister, La Grande Mademoiselle, hard, cross-grained creature! accompanied her—or rather, spied on her. To reach the Carmelites, the Princess had had to pass the Luxembourg, and see once more the quarters where, sixteen years before, she, her sisters, the little La Vallière, and the much-mourned "Cousin Charles," had danced together. What memories and disillusion! When the wretched Marguerite returned to Montmartre in the evening, Sister Louise went back to her cell, whose calm was becoming dearer and dearer to her.

Even inside the cloister, her eyes were always cast down. As she was subject to bad headaches, she was asked if this attitude was not a discomfort. "Not at all," replied she with her usual gentleness; "it rests my eyes. I am so weary of earthly things that it is actually a pleasure to look at them no longer." This statement need not astonish us. One of her sisters in religion, Anne-Marie de Jésus—a penitent, not for faults of her own, but for those of a world she had scarcely seen at all—was given a cell one day which overlooked the garden. She found herself unwittingly enjoying the view and the air, and, to punish herself for the pleasure, for four years her window was, as it were, walled for her.

This continual sacrifice of the senses amazes us, but it is nothing compared to another which Sister Louise was resolved to impose on herself. It is related that the Abbé de Rancé exacted from his novices a great

detachment from their relatives, to the point of never asking for them, of losing, if possible, all memory of their own origin. But what child loves its parents as its parents love it? Did the severe reformer of La Trappe ever dream of a mother refusing to embrace her children? Nevertheless, that was seen at the Carmelites.

About a year or two after Louise de La Vallière had entered the Convent, the Princess Palatine, Duchesse d'Orléans, came to pay her a visit, leading by the hand the little Comte de Vermandois, in order that he might have the joy of embracing his mother. The child was seven or eight at most, and before such innocence all gratings were lowered. But the nun's spirit of renunciation, more inflexible than the grating, refused such solace. Neither the entreaties of the Princess nor the child's grief could conquer her resolution. The Princess Palatine, self-controlled as she was, was touched even to tears.

A little later, there was another trial. Marie-Thérèse, wishing that the Marquis de La Vallière should see his sister otherwise than through the parlour-grating, led him in by the hand—a Royal favour which authorised entrance to the interior of the Convent. Sister Louise, informed of this design, crushed down her feelings of tenderness and ran to the cloister-door. She pointed out that hitherto those Queens who had honoured the Carmelites with a visit had done them the favour of never introducing a man; and her representations were so respectfully enforced that the Queen yielded to them. Louise saw her brother only in the parlour. She was never to see him again. Though still young, hardly thirty-four, the Marquis was already attacked by a grave malady. At the beginning of October, 1676, the doctors made him undergo several operations, as painful as they were unavailing. He died in Paris on

the 13th of the same month.¹ At this sad news, Louise lifted up her heart to God. "My brother," she wrote to Bellefonds, "died very suddenly, and at an age when, according to appearances, one may expect to live long. What shall I say to you of the goodness of the Lord? He has exacted this sacrifice of me, considering as nothing what I offered Him, and it really is nothing,—feeling as I do, through the mercy of the Almighty, ready to sacrifice with my own hand all that is most dear to me in the world, if it be His Holy Will."

At the same time, Sister Louise saw one of her sisters in religion die—one who had been almost a companion, for she had known her in the household of the late Madame. There was an astonishing change in her point of view: for death, formerly so terrible in her eyes, she now ardently desired. "How happy she is!" Louise breathed, as she watched by the dying woman's side. But later, when she was more advanced in the path of submission, she was on her guard against this yearning, and was ready to accept life as a long, unbroken penance.

Louise felt profoundly the ties of kinship. Her brother had been no better manager of his affairs than she had been of her own. She had given up to him her share in the paternal inheritance—but the whole of that was but a trifle. The young Marquis had had considerable bounties from the King in 1664-5, but Louis had taken them nearly all back as soon as they were given—under the pretext of enhancing their value.²

¹ The circular letter says: "Some years after her profession [Louise's] her brother." This is an obvious error, which has been repeated by Le Queux. It proves how closely one should examine even the most conscientious documents.

² "I have resumed the business of the townships for your greater advantage. The cost would have eaten you up, and I wish you to gain more from it than it would be worth, if it remained in your hands" (The King to the Marquis de La Vallière, April 1, 1664. *Œuvres de Louis XIV.*, v. V. p. 376).

Upon the whole, he owed only his marriage to his sister's influence with the King. On his death, it was found that he had left nothing, less than nothing—debts! Sister Louise found herself faced again by creditors—those creditors whose varying claims had tormented her all her life. She wrote to the King, begging of him to preserve the Governorship of the Bourbonnais to her nephew, so as to enable him to fulfil pledges given by his father. Louis received her request favourably, he even added some amiable expressions to the grant: "If he were a good enough man to see so saintly a Carmelite, he would go and tell her himself of his sympathy in her loss." With delicate reticence, Louise had spoken only of the creditors' interests, not even mentioning her nephews'. The liquidation of the Marquis' fortune barely yielded some hundreds of *écus* each to the children.

To these incidents succeeded two years of contemplation and complete silence. All we know is that towards 1679, Louise was ill in her turn. The following year, worldly matters once more invaded her seclusion. In the early days, Sister Louise de la Miséricorde had resolved never again to see her son or daughter. Let not hasty judges rush to pronounce sentence! Our recluse yielded to no selfish sentiment; humility alone inspired her. The King was openly opposed to that austere resolve. He knew how much need her children had of the advice, which, given by the living voice of such a mother, would seem to come straight from Heaven. Moreover, among the Carmelites it is considered a duty to keep up family-relations when it is a question not of pleasure, but of usefulness to one's own people.

Opportunities were not wanting. The little Princess, after a brilliant appearance at Court in 1674, had

returned to the guardianship of Mme Colbert. An odd education was hers, in its mingling of gorgeousness and severity. For the child to leave off wearing a pinafore at ten, it was necessary to have a special order from the King!¹ At the same time, without being exactly made into a Household, the service of Marie-Anne and her brother was organised on a grand scale. Ten thousand *livres* were granted as the young lady's dress-allowance, and she managed to spend twelve thousand five hundred! Louis loved this daughter as much as his nature permitted him to love any one.

Marie-Anne figured early in political calculations. In October, 1674, she was offered to the Prince of Orange, who turned a deaf ear to the overtures. Later on, the Duke of Savoy was spoken of. Finally another project was put forward—and, this time, successfully.

In 1680, the House of Condé had been back in favour, and even in credit, for the last twenty years. Yet, despite the protestations of fidelity on the one hand and of friendship on the other, it was felt that all mistrust had not vanished; and, desirous to give the King a signal mark of their devotion, the Condés asked for young Marie-Anne's hand for the Prince de Conti. Louis, whose vanity was flattered, behaved generously. He settled a fortune of a million *livres* and an income of a hundred thousand on his daughter, in addition to the jewellery and gems which she had from her mother. The Queen, the Dauphin, Monsieur, Madame, La Grande Mademoiselle, the Princes and Princesses, legitimate and legitimated, signed the

¹ "My daughter of Blois has asked permission to leave off wearing her pinafore. I consent, if Mme Colbert approves" (In camp before Cambray, April 8, 1677. *Lettres, mémoires, instructions de Colbert*, v. VI. p. 338).

contract. The mother was styled "the very high and mighty Lady, Louise-Françoise, Duchesse de La Vallière . . . now a professed nun in the Carmelite Convent, in the Faubourg St. Jacques." This mention, incidental as it was, allowed the *fiancée* to present her future husband to her mother; and the youthful Conti, son of a man whose life had edified the Court, showed great deference to Sister Louise de la Miséricorde. In renouncing the world, the penitent had reconquered what the world gives only to the meritorious: its esteem and its respect. The Prince and the Duke hastened to the Carmelites. With the perfect tact of their race, they did not omit a visit to Mme de Saint-Remi, to her daughter Mme d'Enragues, step-sister of Louise, and even to an obscure aged aunt who lived in a suburb.¹ A month later, Mme de Sévigné had an opportunity of seeing Sister Louise.

"What an angel appeared at last! for the Prince de Conti kept her in the parlour. For me she had all her old charm. I thought her neither bloated nor sallow; she is not so thin, and she looks happier; her eyes and her looks are the same; austerity, poor food, and little sleep have neither lined nor deadened them. The strange habit takes nothing from her grace; her modesty is no greater than when she gave a Princesse de Conti to the world, yet it is sufficient for a Carmelite. All that she says is so in keeping with her person, that I think nothing could be better. M. de Conti loves and honours her tenderly; she is, as it were, his director; he is devout, and will be like his father. Truly she has put on great dignity with her nun's habit."

¹ Mme DE SÉVIGNÉ, *Lettres*. I had wrongly supposed this aunt to be Marie de La Vallière, godmother to Louise, and widow (after a second marriage) of Erard du Chastelet. It was in reality her mother's sister.

Though actually poor, and now still poorer through her vows, Louise did not neglect to offer a wedding-present. A lady of great virtue (supposed to be the Queen) had filched from her, as it were, the manuscript of *Réflexions sur la miséricorde de Dieu*, for the lady in question did not wish the public and the faithful to be deprived of so many edifying thoughts. She promised that Sister Louise's name should not be mentioned; but the Preface was so full of allusions that the veil of anonymity was quite torn away. The modest publication made a great sensation. The principal passages of these *Réflexions* have been noticed already, and must charm all by their touching simplicity; the Preface, on the contrary, was remarkable for its extraordinary assurance. It spoke of the author, a lady long-sought-out by God's mercy, "in the corruption of the century, to make of her a miracle of repentance. May heaven grant that those following her in her sin may imitate her also in her penance, and make good use of the time granted by God's mercy to reflect seriously on their salvation." Finally, in order that there should be no mistake as to the source of the warning, it finished with this quotation: *Inspice et fac secundum exemplar, quod tibi in Monte monstratum est* ("Watch and follow the example given thee on the Mountain"). In chapter xxv. of Exodus, from which this passage is taken, Mount Sinai is alluded to; but it needs no great effort to apply it to Mount Carmel, and this Convent of Carmelites, situated on Mount Sainte-Geneviève.

The illusions formed on certain conversions in 1675 had long been dissipated. Mme de Montespan had not only come back to Court, *maîtresse-en-titre*, but she had had to bear with the presence of additional and "occasional" favourites, such as the du Lude and the Fontanges. Louis, arbiter of Europe, lived in open

profligacy, publicly, undisturbed, like an Olympian god exempt from laws which were made for mere mortals. The warning given in the Preface to the *Réflexions* pointed directly at Louis XIV. But who had been daring enough to write it? No one knows. . . . Meanwhile, those who heard Bourdaloue preach just then must have made curious comparisons. In a sermon preached before the Court and King,¹ the courageous Jesuit took for his subject the conversion of the Magdalen, "a miracle, which God in His mysterious providence has willed to become public, in order that the sinners of the century should have in this example . . . a perfect model of penitence. . . ." "And now," added the orator, "I would say to a worldly soul troubled with remorse of conscience, what St. Ambrose said to the Emperor Theodosius: *Ubi secutus es errantem, sequere penitentem*. That Holy Bishop spoke of David ; and I, O dear listener ! I speak of Magdalen, and I tell you : If you have had the misfortune to follow that sinner in the disorders of her life, comfort yourself—for, utter sinner as she was, she has yet found grace before God ; but nevertheless tremble, if, having followed her in her disorders, you have not the courage to follow her in her repentance."

Let us compare this sermon of Bourdaloue's and the preface to the *Réflexions* of Louise de La Vallière. Almost the same thoughts, and the same words ! Unfortunately the exact chronology of the oratorical works of this eloquent Jesuit has not yet been established. All we know is that he spoke of the *illustrious penitent* a short time after pronouncing the discourse on Impurity, by which the Royal ears were offended. Not accepting the indirect blame whose echo reached

¹ This sermon for the Thursday of the fifth week (v. I. p. 508) contains an allusion to the sermon for the Sunday of the third week, preached before the King—a famous sermon, whose subject was *Impurity* (*Œuvres*, v. I. p. 352, éd. 1872).

him : "What I have said is displeasing to the world," cried Bourdaloue . . . "but what pleases the world is not always the best nor the most necessary for the world. What displeases it is often the medicine which, bitter as it is, will cure it. To be shocked and scandalised at such truths is one of the most evident signs of needing them. Let us return to our subject." And then the preacher spoke of Magdalen with the "respect due to that penitent who is even more famous for her repentance than for her disorder."

The *Réflexions* obtained rapid success. Editions followed one another quickly. Belgian piracies, translations into foreign tongues—all spread the work. In Germany, the name of the Duchesse de La Vallière was boldly attached to it. The *Journal des Savants*¹ gave it discreet praise and—most difficult of all conquests—Mademoiselle de Montpensier actually admitted that the author had "rather a pious style."

Whilst commonplace minds thus expressed themselves about her, the penitent submitted uncomplainingly to ever bitter and more bitter trials. Her son, the Comte de Vermandois, was well-built and nice-looking. His slightly wavering eyes expressed great sweetness.² Intelligent and amiable, endowed with all his mother's charm, seductive like her, like her also he was easily captivated. He altered greatly on the death of Mme Colbert, and fell into the clutches of the Chevalier de Lorraine and his brother M. de Marsan, one already old, the other still young—and both equally vicious.

¹ *Journal des Savants*, July 15, 1680: "If the behaviour of this lady had made less noise in the world through her retirement from it, perhaps we might have been allowed to make her known." Is not this a slip of the learned one's pen? Must we not read, instead of *through*, *before* her retirement?

² Besides the portraits done in childhood, which are at Versailles, there is an engraving from a portrait painted by Mignard of the Comte de Vermandois, about the period now engaging us. This portrait has been engraved by Sornique.

The child, barely thirteen at most, came under the influence of these corrupt men—to what degree is not certainly known. If we credit Mme de Maintenon, who was little given to indulgence, the evil was limited to some trifling in the Garden of Diana.¹ But enemies, such as the Montespan, spoke of “debauchery.” Wondrous are the sort of women who affect that sort of indignation! . . . A blow given to the Dauphin, who was four years the elder, was also spoken of. Worried by this perfidious gossip, the King, who had never cared much for his son, forbade him his presence. But he had still his mother. Even regarded as youthful peccadilloes, these disorders caused Mme de La Vallière “much anxiety.” The lad, gently reprimanded, made a general confession and promised amendment. These are not the actions of a bad type of culprit, yet Vermandois was treated as such. The Duchesse d’Orléans, good soul, interceded in his favour, but the King was inexorable. The poor boy, at first imprisoned in Normandy, then exiled to Versailles while the Court was at Fontainebleau, lived with his tutor, the Abbé Fleury, seeing no one. This species of imprisonment only ended on the day that the young Admiral asked to be allowed to make his first campaign.

In 1683, Louis XIV., in consequence of futile claims put forward at the Conference of Courtrai, was determined, as the stronger, to enforce justice himself. Forty thousand men, under the command of the Maréchal d’Humières, were—less as an operation of

¹ *Correspondance générale de Madame de Maintenon*, v. II. p. 323. The Garden of Diana, here spoken of, is probably that joined to the Palace of Fontainebleau, “garden of the Queen and sometimes ‘of Diana’” (V. GUILBERT, *Description historique du palais de Fontainebleau*, t. I. p. 211. Paris, 1731). The Princess Palatine indirectly gives the date of the adventure, which took place before the birth of the Duc de Bourgogne.

war than as a military occupation—ordered to the Spanish Netherlands. The Comte de Vermandois, under the direction of M. de Montchevreuil, was now to see in application those maxims which his grand-uncle, La Vallière, had bequeathed him in the *Général d'Armée*, quite recently reprinted. The young fellow was in his element. No sooner was he arrived than he went scouting like any mere underling. Alert, straightforward, good-natured, all the officers liked him. He was very generous and delicate in his favours, and when he encountered persons too proud to accept gifts, he made wagers and arranged to lose, or else had money conveyed to their table without revealing the quarter whence it came. In short, his success was so great that the King complimented his tutor upon it, and authorised all outlays which might be needful to carry on the good beginning. But this first paternal smile was to be the last. The military operations became more serious and arduous. Developed as he was, the Admiral was only sixteen. Fever, which even old soldiers cannot escape, seized on our young recruit. He concealed his illness for three days, fearing to be prevented from sharing in the assault on Courtrai. In an attack on a suburb, the whole army admired his courage. It was, alas! his supreme effort. In fact, the same letter announced to Louis XIV. (too-late enlightened as to his son's merit) both his first exploit and his serious illness. The King ordered his return to Lille, but it was no longer possible to move him. Delirium set in, and during the night of November 17-18, he died, mourned by all those who had acclaimed him the day before. His body was interred with great pomp in the Abbey of Saint-Vaast at Arras.

After what has just been said, it is hardly necessary for us to contradict afresh the authors of a fable which was wide-spread in the eighteenth century, and

according to which the Comte de Vermandois (said to be dead, but very much alive) was obliged, for an offence to the Dauphin, to undergo perpetual imprisonment as the famous Man in the Iron Mask.¹

No one doubted the death of the Prince. According to some, the intense regret for Vermandois took on the proportions of a public grief. Lauzun, now two years out of prison, spoke with enthusiasm of the loss sustained by King and State: this child of sixteen surpassed the greatest men who had ever existed. Such excessive eulogies had for effect the re-awakening of the old Mademoiselle's ancient jealousy. She said the young Prince died "of drinking too much brandy." She was not at all displeased "that M. du Maine had no brother ahead of him." It had cost her so much to despoil herself of her fortune in favour of that other hump-backed, sickly bastard that she was now determined to have something for her money. She could not contain herself, and made public her secret thought. "After all that had been said of Mme de La Vallière, it was not seemly of Lauzun thus to praise her son." By these ridiculous insinuations one can judge of what was likely to be said by a Montespan. Ten years of retirement among the Carmelites could not stifle the voice of calumny.

¹ We have found in the accounts of Mme Colbert, preserved in the National Archives, mention of journeys taken to visit the prisoner in Normandy. But it is evident that here it is only question of a temporary punishment, the consequence of some fault—the offence to the Dauphin, it may be. Père Griffet already knew or suspected the fact (*Traité des différentes preuves qui servent à établir la vérité dans l'histoire*). Voltaire, either of his own accord, or echoing his contemporaries, took hold of it, and was the first (*Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de Perse*) to affirm that La Vallière's son lived under the mask of that vulgar prisoner, the valet of Fouquet and of Lauzun, guarded by Saint-Mars. Since then, twenty different persons have been substituted for Vermandois, and the mask is not yet worn out. Truly it is of iron, like credulity and the love of the marvellous! See *Nicolas Fouquet*, v. II. p. 527. I also touched on this question in a lecture given to the Society of Norman Antiquarians in 1893. See *Bulletin* for 1893.

But Sister Louise de la Miséricorde had been informed of the illness, said to be "trifling," of the Comte de Vermandois. Almost immediately followed the despatch announcing his death. The Prioress¹ was still reflecting on the best way of breaking the bad news to the poor mother, when she met her coming out of the choir. Startled, she told her that she had received news—and then, dared say no more. But she looked so sad that Louise asked no more. "I quite understand," said she, and returning at once, she prostrated herself before the Blessed Sacrament. Her prayer ended, she reappeared with great serenity. She did not speak of her grief; no one saw her weep. A friend of hers, touched by this effort from such a tender nature, told her that a few tears would relieve her, and that God did not forbid them to a heart resigned. "All must be sacrificed," replied the penitent. "It is for myself I ought to weep."² Though Rachel, at Bethlehem, would not be consoled, at least her affliction was allowed to have its course. Louise repulsed all worldly solace; she even feared that she might wound by her maternal complaints the virginal ears of the nuns

¹ *L'histoire de Mademoiselle de La Vallière*, heading the *Lettres*, p. 68, says that the Mère de Bellefonds was then Superior. Now, in 1683, the Superior was the Mère Claire du Saint-Sacrament (Cousin, *La jeunesse de Madame de Longueville*, Appendix, list of Prioresses, etc., p. 348).

² Lettre circulaire, P. CLÉMENT, *Réflexions*, v. II. p. 176. We adhere to that authentic text. The *Journal historique*, Verdun, July, 1710, p. 68, gives this version: "When I have wept enough for his birth, I shall think of weeping for his death." The *Vie pénitente* (1712) embellished this further; then Voltaire, in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV.*, gave it the form of an antithesis: "It is not the death of this son, but his birth that I should mourn." That is too "artistic." The author of the *Siècle de Louis XIV.* had read the *Mémoires* of Mme de Caylus, where Louise answers Bossuet: "It is too much to mourn the death of a son whose birth I have not yet mourned." LE QUEUX, in the preface to the *Lettres*, p. 70, mingles all these versions. We do not cite modern writers.

who had sheltered her—just as, at the time of this same son's birth, she had, for fear of hurting the Queen, borne the most intense pain without a murmur.

Every day some incident reminded the recluse that, though she had left the world, the world would not easily let go its prey. Her debts pursued her into the very cloister. When the Comte de Vermandois died, among his possessions was found an immense claim for 150,000 *livres*, lent by "the Admiral" to "the Duchess" at legal interest. Certainly, the Duchess had not borrowed this sum for herself, and the transaction concerned property of which she was but the titular proprietor. Nevertheless she was liable to find herself, on this account, a debtor to the Crown—a department as rapacious then as now.

At the discussion of the marriage-contract between Mlle de Blois and the Prince de Conti, Louis XIV. had instituted between his daughter and son civil ties which the Acts of Legitimation alone could not create. New Letters-Patent conferred on brother and sister respectively the rights of succession. Mention was made of this in Marie-Anne's contract. All the same, the Crown took possession of the Comte de Vermandois' property, alleging that those Letters only entitled the Princesse de Conti to inherit under a will, and that her brother had died intestate. It would be idle to discuss the arguments put forth by the Treasury. They were at least plausible, since the King was obliged to specify his intention of declaring Mme de Conti her brother's heiress, conformably to the Letters of January, 1680, and to the clauses of her marriage-contract.¹ This stubborn attitude of the Treasury officials is not unworthy of notice.

¹ *Recueil général*, v. III. p. 336. The letters were registered March 18, 1684.

Saint Teresa, when recommending her nuns not willingly to mix themselves up with the every-day business of their kindred, gave as a reason the fact that they would be only too often impelled by grave events to come out of their retirement to advise or to console. What happened in the family of Sister Louise de la Miséricorde amply justified such wise provisions. The poor woman had hardly liquidated her son's property before she had to regulate that of her son-in-law. The reader will remember in the midst of what transports of joy were celebrated the nuptials of Armand de Bourbon, Prince de Conti, and Marie-Anne, *demoiselle* de Blois. It was a marriage made in Heaven, a marriage of love on earth ! The pair loved each other "as in the romances." One of them was nineteen, the other barely fourteen ; both were very ignorant of the world, and, above all, of themselves. The awakening was prompt and cruel. Three months after this ideal wedding, the little Princess declared her husband to be ill-shapen ; and all asked themselves "where a girl of thirteen or fourteen could have learnt what was the shape of a well-shaped man !" The King drew aside this little lady, so young yet already so capable, and for three hours gave her "a talking-to." But he had his trouble for nothing. Louis had diverted himself with the romantic fancy of two children. He had played with his daughter as if she were a doll, and, no matter what he might say now as father and master, Marie-Anne went on being "like a little harpy" to her husband." How could she have fancied this Louis-Armand, so awkward and pedantic, when she had his brother before her eyes, the Prince de La Roche-sur-Yon, her first partner at her first ball ? It was *he* who really appreciated her dancing ! He appreciated it so openly and after a fashion so impertinent, that his brother,

touchy as all deformed persons are, was wild with jealousy. And when we think that the hero of this caprice was at most fifteen or sixteen! Louis ought to have sent the absurd children back into their schoolrooms. But was the King any wiser than they were? . . . *Conti was not deformed. His brother* 1474

Then came another misfortune. Conti did not stop at being jealous. This good young man, formerly so quick to solicit the advice of Sister Louise, so docile, so virtuous, turned suddenly into a prodigal and a libertine, neglecting his mother-in-law, ignoring his friends and his wife, passing all his time with profligates? . . . He no longer thought of anything but roving about the world and duelling. Here was a too-dazzling example, for great and small, of the fate in store for rash love and romantic marriages! Fortunately, these impious and precocious rivals recovered their brotherly affection on the battle-field. First they emulated one another in courage at the siege of Courtrai, fighting beside their brother-in-law and cousin, Vermandois. Then, when peace was re-established on the French frontier, they rushed, in spite of the King, to seek further laurels on the banks of the Danube.

This last escapade so irritated Louis XIV. that he forbade the Princesse de Conti to send a halfpenny to the volunteers. Either from a spirit of contradiction, or a return of tenderness, Marie-Anne, so hard to the husband "in presence," showed herself quite devoted to the absent Prince. They wrote tender and satirical letters to each other, full of Court-gossip. Very prudently, the couple did not make use of the post; but the King suspected those who suspected the post. He knew no delicacy as to the privacy of letters. He had the page Mercy, courier of the Prince de Conti, arrested, his baggage seized, and his person

searched.¹ Alas, the Dutch Gazettes were not more caustic than this correspondence between a daughter of France and a Prince of the Royal Family! And the criticisms wounded the King all the more because they touched on a point involving his vanity.

Despite the unsuccessful result of the Conti-de Blois union, Louis XIV. on July 23, 1685, married almost under the same conditions, his natural daughter, Louise-Françoise, known as Mlle de Nantes, aged twelve, to Louis, Duc de Bourbon, aged sixteen. It was felt to be so offensive not only to reason, but to nature, that in the evening they were only put for the sake of form in the same bed. The Montespan alone—that most heartless of women and mothers—regretted that the marriage had not been consummated.²

Fortunately, this infamy is irrelevant to our subject. We return to the Princesse de Conti. She appeared with so divine a grace at the ceremony that she seemed “beyond humanity.” From the height of this triumph she thought it amusing to send her husband a comic account of the wedding, calling the young couple “the married puppets.” Yet Louise-Françoise was her sister, and the goddaughter of her mother, the Duchesse de La Vallière. But this last detail was known to few.

Doubtless the “little puppets” would have been yielded up as fitting prey for the impertinence of the young demi-goddess, if she had not aimed her darts higher still, at a goddess at once superior and un-avowed. Having espoused the most virtuous and noble

¹ “The letters went on, and the King, who has always been very curious to open them. . . .” (DANGEAU, *Mémoires*, v. V. p. 167; March, 1695).

² SOURCHES, *Mémoires*, v. I. p. 252. LAVALLÉE (*Correspondance générale de Madame de Maintenon*, v. II. p. 409) wrongly supposes that MM. de la Roche-sur-Yon, etc., were in Hungary with the Prince de Conti. Ed. DE BARTHÉLEMY (*La Princesse de Conti*, p. 328) calls the courier Merez.

of Princesses, having had as mistresses the tenderest, the wittiest, and the prettiest women of their time, Louis XIV., still young, barely in his forty-fourth year, had, like any old fool, married his bastards' governess ! If religion and strict morality excuse this inept union, preferring it to some scandalous intimacy, it must also be confessed that the spectacle of the Widow Scarron, seated between the throne of Marie-Thérèse and the tabouret of the Montespan, excited the contempt of some, the wrath of others, and the raillery of all. That enigmatic woman, henceforth sure of her ascendancy, played the part of a perfect step-mother. She did everything imaginable to make the king find pleasure and innocent amusement in the bosom of his family—so the good ladies of St. Cyr assure us. Was a walk, a game, some amusement planned ? Instantly Madame would say to the King : “ Let us send for the Princesse de Conti.” The Princess came—and Madame thought her charming, and cried, “ Here is a Princess who has turned out very well.” And she who had “ turned out so well ” was writing to her husband : “ The King often takes a walk, and I find myself between Mme de Maintenon and Mme la Princesse d'Harcourt ; you can imagine how I enjoy myself ! ”

It was these gay letters which were seized and handed over to the lady who walked and dined with the King. The Marquise affected deep disdain in public, but privately made bitter moan to the Princesse de Conti. “ Weep, Madame, weep ; for there is no greater misfortune than to lack a kind heart.” Louis, who formerly had indulged in so many doubtful pleasantries with regard to the Queen, “ would permit no one to make fun of Mme de Maintenon.” He was angry ; but he greatly loved his daughter, who, he knew, loved him. So the Lady, magnanimous and

subtle, contrived to mollify the King, whose wrath was not very serious. The Princess got off with a slice of humble-pie: she had to beg the intercession of the woman she hated.

But the Prince de Conti did not escape so easily. Several of his friends' letters were found, full of "abominable vice" and "great impiety." Mme de Maintenon, too, was much abused in them. Always charitable, however, she contented herself with pointing out the offences towards the King. Certainly, the Prince was but the recipient of these letters; still, if it was thought well to write them, it must have been supposed that he would enjoy reading them. However it was, this time also Jupiter's thunder was to break harmlessly. The two young Conti men, covered with wounds and glory, had stopped beyond the Rhine before Strasbourg, on the French frontier, awaiting the King's pleasure (September 1, 1685). Louis, who was in reality very proud of their success, forgave them. Having imposed on them a sort of sojourn in Purgatory, far from the sight of himself,¹ he was ready, on the assurance of his son-in-law's perfect contrition, to restore to him the full contemplation of his Royal Majesty, when the young Prince was suddenly called before the King of Kings.

An epidemic of small-pox had broken out. This dangerous malady, then particularly terrible, attacked La Vallière's daughter, the Princesse de Conti, on the very eve of a triumph, for she was rehearsing most successfully the steps of a new ballet, the *Temple de la Paix* (October 12, 1685). The King hastened to his daughter, and found with her his son-in-law, who insisted on shutting himself up with his wife, despite the danger. Marie-Anne recovered; the Prince died.

¹ "The King had deprived M. le Prince de Conti of the right of entry to his room. . . It was a great mortification for him to have to wait at a door" (SOURCHES, *Mémoires*, v. I. p. 304).

The disease carried him off in five or six days. These Conti were certainly the true sons of a good mother. Hardly had the Prince de la Roche-sur-Yon heard of his elder's illness than he hastened to his side. The Princess herself, spared by the scourge, wished to risk her life anew—and more than her life, her beauty. Only the express wish of her husband prevented her from remaining day and night at his bedside. Never was shown more complete or more spontaneous conjugal devotion. Those who witnessed it never doubted that it sprang from the generosity of noble and affectionate hearts. But such is the persistence of a bad reputation, that the great moralist La Bruyère wrote in his *Caractères*: “We do, from vanity or a sense of decorum, the same things, and in the same manner, as those we do from inclination or a sense of duty. So-and-so has just died in Paris from a fever contracted while nursing an unloved wife.” *So-and-so* is the Prince de Conti. Thus are human judgments formed and propagated !

From all this we perceive that family anxieties were not spared to Sister Louise de la Miséricorde. She had always loved the young Prince de Conti for his sweet disposition, as well as in memory of his parents. But she was firm and resigned, as at the death of her son. We must do her contemporaries the justice to say that none of them mistook the cause of this apparent lack of feeling. Louise was not taking refuge in a kind of contemplative egotism. Far from that, she added to her grief the voluntary privation of solace, which she could easily have obtained. Again, if her Mother, if her Sisters, in religion did not offer to share her sorrows, it was not from indifference. To these handmaidens of Christ it was taught that to go to the help of a companion who had not given way under the weight of her cross was—not to succour her, but to rob her of a grace.

The following year brought more sorrow. Mme de Saint-Remi died about the beginning of April.¹ This time there is complete silence on the subject of Louise's feelings—and that is well. Truly, there would have been something impious in spying on the poor lady, expiating her error, while she wept for the ignoble mother who had never protected her.

¹ DANGEAU, *Mémoires*, v. I. p. 318. See April 4. See also *Mémoires de Sourches*, v. I. p. 375. The Princesse de Conti gave the pension of two thousand *écus* allowed to her grandmother, to the Duchesse de Choiseul, her cousin-german through the Marquis de La Vallière.

CHAPTER III

1686-1710

WE have seen what anxiety, care, and grief pursued Louise into that retreat where superficial minds imagine that utter repose is to be found. The nun, as sensitive as the Duchess, was, however, more resigned. She had been uncertain of herself at first, and so she had begun by preventing herself from embracing her children. She felt firmer now, and she undertook the duty of looking after her nephews and nieces.

Her brother had left one son and two daughters. Of these latter, the elder, Louise-Gabrielle (evidently a god-daughter), married, on June 30, 1681, César-Auguste de Choiseul. She was a handsome girl, "with a divine figure . . . and charmingly intelligent." Mme de Sévigné called her "Triumphant Choiseul," and truly her beauty did triumph over very serious illnesses; but she was light to the verge of misconduct, and compromised herself to such an extent that her husband was called upon to choose between having her shut up or abandoning all hope of his Marshal's bâton. Choiseul, who was a brave soldier—and a credulous husband—renounced his hopes of the bâton; yet was obliged in the end to repudiate the lady also. No one had the smallest control over the naughty Duchess; but it was felt that at least she must not be allowed to infect her sister, Marie-Yolande—so

her aunt sent the younger girl, as a "parlour-boarder," to the Abbey of Faremoustier. All intercourse with Mme de Choiseul was forbidden. "I may tell you, between ourselves," wrote Bossuet to the Abbess, "that Mme de La Vallière, the Carmelite nun, begged me to insist on this." On the other hand, Louis desired that they should receive the girl's mother, the Marquise de La Vallière. But behold, Marie-Yolande was already infected! She did not like the cloister, threatened to kill herself—upset the whole place with her tantrums. The Princesse de Conti was appealed to, and intervened, saying that if her cousin would not listen to reason, she would have to yield to force. Bossuet, disturbed and worried, attacked Louise's solitude once more. It is a peculiarity of those nuns who feel a true vocation to dread even the appearance of restraint for others. Louise caused Marie-Anne to be set at liberty, and they ended by finding her a husband—Charles du Mas, Marquis de Brossay (June 3, 1697).

On the occasion of this marriage, the Princesse de Conti had asked her Royal father's permission to invite her aunt, Mme d'Entraques, and her cousin, the Duchesse de Choiseul, to the ceremony. The King replied that the Duchess was too notorious, but that his daughter might consult Mme de La Vallière, and "do whatever she said." Whereupon the irreproachable Mme de Maintenon wrote off to the Archbishop of Paris: "I do not doubt that our holy Carmelite will exact this concession, without realising that, in so doing, she will be injuring her daughter more than she will be honouring others"! She wrote *holy*, because she dared not write *silly*.² Her hard, calculating nature could not understand a sweet soul like that of Louise. The Duchesse de Choiseul, once "The Triumphant," was now The Repudiated, and already the victim of that affection of the lungs which killed

her in the flower of her age—and our gentle Carmelite pitied her profoundly.

We have seen the Princesse de Conti intervening to keep her cousin in order. That would have been all very well if this Dowager of twenty-seven had not continually needed to be kept in order herself. Marie-Anne, who had deeply mourned her husband, had consoled herself quickly—and often. She soon fell into discredit. The King scolded, but in vain. Of all his children she is said to have been the most like him; and so she was. But though physically a Bourbon, Marie-Anne showed herself a true daughter of La Vallière in grace, kindness, and spontaneous generosity. She never lost her love for her mother's family. While Louis XIV.'s men of business were arranging everything so that her fortune, in default of direct heirs, should revert to the Crown, *she*, young as she was, was trying to make, and succeeded in making, her cousin La Vallière proprietor of the demesne of Vaujours. With exquisite delicacy, she insisted on transmitting this estate to him, free of all expense. It now brought in almost nothing—scarcely eight or ten thousand *livres*. She paid the pensions which her mother, on abandoning the world, had left to some relatives and old servants; and whenever the Carmelites wanted anything for their poor, Louise confidently applied to her daughter. She was even bold enough to reprimand her for her faults. One day she wrote to her friend Bellefonds: "We must pray for her, and ask that she may enter into the Kingdom of God; for apparently nothing else will be wanting to her" (September 6, 1688). A little later, writing to Denis Dodart, the Princess's doctor, an excellent man, she said again: "I hope much from your care for the

soul as well as for the body of this poor woman." Poor woman! Marie-Anne de Bourbon, *légitimée* of France, Dowager of Conti, rich, beautiful, witty! 'Tis thus that from the heights of Carmel the grandeurs of the world are regarded.

Curiosity and admiration brought many a visitor to our recluse. Pope's Nuncios, Ambassadors, Foreign Princes, all came to the Carmelite's parlour. Some wanted to see, others to hear, the "illustrious penitent" who had amazed all Europe. Sister Louise's humility and love of solitude were broken in upon by these multifarious distractions; but she accepted them as a sacrifice, and thought that she owed her God this kind of public testimony to His loving-kindness. One day she was told that Mme de Montespan awaited her at the *grille*—Mme de Montespan, no longer the arrogant favourite, with her train of courtiers around her, parading an indecent gaiety in the austere retreat; but Mme de Montespan disgraced, banished from Court, wanting to take refuge in a nunnery, but not able to make up her mind to stay there—Mme de Montespan, deserted by her lover, repudiated by her husband, despised by all her children, legitimate or not! And Athénais would ask her victim for counsel which never in her life would she be capable of carrying out.¹ The pride of the one, the discretion of the other, have left us no record of these interviews. Before going into her convent, the Duchesse de La Vallière had said: "If ever I am in trouble at the Carmelites, I shall recall to mind what all these people here have

¹ "I saw Mme de Montespan . . . when she was no longer at Court . . . going to Mme de La Vallière, who had become, as it were, her spiritual director" (*Souvenirs de Mme de Caylus*, p. 35. Ramnié ed. Paris, 1881). MM. Lemoine and Lichtenberger have published Mme de Montespan's baptismal certificate. In it she seems to have been given only the name of Françoise, which, in actual life, was replaced by those of Athénais and Diane. Perhaps these two were given her at her confirmation.

inflicted upon me." But, on the contrary, it was "these people" who now sought her as the confidante of their own troubles !

One of the most remarkable traits in the character of Sister Louise was charity—and that not only contemplative, but, when necessary, active. She did not lose interest in the needs of her Church and country. Far from resembling those religious women who affect indifference to the joys and griefs of the rest of the world, Louise de la Miséricorde—more generous and assuredly more Christian—never missed an opportunity for doing good.

But all her efforts were not crowned with success. One day, Bellefonds begged her to write to the Anglican Doctor, Burnett, who was passing through Paris, and whom he hoped to convert to Catholicism. The Doctor went to the Carmelites. In his youth—and Bellefonds was doubtless ignorant of this—Burnett had lived a solitary and austere life, and had attributed to that excessive virtue his early breakdown in health. He was now a big, fat man, and the monastic austerity which he beheld at the Carmelites simply revolted him. He was very far from being converted—on the contrary, he twice re-married after this ; but he always retained a hostile memory of the attempt, as he showed in a book which he wrote in later years. "Bellefonds," said he, "read his Bible attentively, and lived the life of a hermit at Court"—going on to describe him as "a most pious gentleman, but particularly foolish." Burnett, however, had the good taste to say nothing about Sister Louise's character.

One chronicler seems to imply that Mme de La Vallière attempted to intervene in the theological squabbles which troubled the second half of the seven-

teenth century—but he is alone in his implication. The Grand Convent had early repudiated the whole Jansenist teaching.¹ In a letter, of which we possess only a short analysis, Louise speaks enthusiastically of a prelate who would not permit, in his diocese, the easy doctrine of Père Lemoyne, nor the *Traité de l'art d'expédier une confession*.

But these details are uncertain. Here are some certain ones. Louise de La Vallière had chosen as her motto that phrase of the Duchesse de Longueville : "The body has sinned ; let the body suffer." She asked to be given all the hardest, coarsest labours—and she added fasting to the bread-and-water diet. Mother Agnès de Bellefonds often enjoined her to moderate her austerities. "You would spare me, my Mother," replied the penitent ; "but God will not let me be spared." One Good Friday, listening to the tale of Christ crucified—His thirst slaked by vinegar and gall—she remembered how, hunting at Fontainebleau, she used to send for and drink long, delicious beverages ; and, for three months after that, she lived without drinking at all, and for three years took only half a glass of water in the day. Her health suffered from this privation, and once more she was reprimanded. Again, it was observed that one of her legs bore traces of a deep erysipelas-like wound—and yet, no one had heard a complaint from Sister Louise. Once more she was severely blamed, and excused herself by saying that she had hardly noticed it.

Nor did this arise from any undue exaltation of spirit. "My heart," she would say, "is ready to implore the Lord to deliver me for ever from this

¹ See the MS. *Mémoire* preserved at the Carmelite Convent until the Ladies were obliged to go into exile. Let us hope that they may soon return to their country and their holy dwelling. (Note written in 1902.) "Soon" will come—tardily—but it *will* come. . .

prison. . . But since I do not know that some vanity is not mingled with my desire to do good, I say with all my soul: Thy will be done, O Lord. Perfect submission and humble acceptance of all that it pleases the Divine Providence to send us, is the only way to draw down upon ourselves His abundant mercy."

Her sincere and simple piety had actually disarmed the venomous libellists of the period. By 1678, they were already admitting that nobler motives than mortification had driven her into the Convent. In 1695, the book-sellers, unable to resist the golden temptation, republished, under the title of *Vie de la Duchesse de La Vallière*, a miserable compilation of the pamphlets published about 1665. They announced that the public would find them to be "a curious narrative of her love-affair and repentance," and that "nothing more beautiful than the sequel to her conversion had ever been known." Finally, alluding to the *Réflexions sur la miséricorde de Dieu*: "One would be obliged," said they, "to copy the whole little book if one wished to point out all that it contains in the way of touching and sincerely penitent passages. Therefore we shall say no more, but simply refer the reader to the text. Perhaps already even we have said too much; perhaps we shall be accused of making a medley of holy things and profligate anecdotes." By this time, indeed, the *Réflexions* had been reprinted six times, without counting the translations and forgeries.

The name of La Vallière had never been detested as that of Montespan had; and by this time it had become so positively popular that it was given to collections of dreams and visions. The recluse was being transformed into a seer! ¹

¹ *Brièves remarques sur le songe de la reine réfugiée d'Angleterre et sur celui de madame L. de La Vallière, nommée à présent la Mère L. de la Miséricorde* (Amsterdam. T. Lejeune. 1690). See *Bulletin du Bibliophile*, 1860, p. 1009.

We have mentioned the tributes of respect from the King, from Princes, and from dignitaries of the Church. Besides these, Queen Marie-Thérèse, the Dauphiness, the Duchesse de Bourgogne, all went regularly to visit Sister Louise. The King would always remind them not to forget that she was a Duchess and to cause her to be seated in their presence. But the Duchess would refuse. "When I made my profession, I renounced all, forgot all ; I am only a nun, like the rest." Perhaps superficial people imagined that the Carmelites were proud of their penitent, but if they did, they were very much mistaken. Louise always declared that they had done her an incalculable favour in admitting her to the number of those holy women.

That was the essence of the cry which broke from her when she was mourning the death of Mother Agnès de Bellefonds. "As for myself, sir," she wrote to the Marshal, "think, I implore you, of all that I owe her. Only such charity as hers could have dared to accept a wretch like myself. She did not hesitate, as you know. I still marvel at it as much as I did at first." And her feeling was fine and right. Louise was expiating her own errors among innocent, pure women who were offering themselves to God *in expiation for the sins of others*. And, in a touching rivalry of generosity, the Carmelite Sisters, while never reminding their penitent of the charity they had shown her, admired in silence her sincere remorse and her complete change of heart.

At Carmel, there are no honorary functions ; there are only *duties* in the fullest sense of the word, and the most worthy undertake them equally with the rest. Louise, as she herself admitted, was a bad housekeeper, and she had suffered too deeply in her high place in society to desire aught in her retreat but the lowest seat of all. She was merely appointed

sacristine : that is to say, she tended the Oratory of the Convent. Her humility was so great that she asked to be relegated to the poorest Convent of the Order—and the most remote. But her request was not acceded to. "Her example," said the Mother Prioress, "was too useful to us, and her person too dear, for us to consent to her removal." Must not a refusal couched in such terms have been a most precious recompense for twenty-five years of repentance? What a change, was it not? from the day when, on hearing her name, the nuns had instinctively, as it were, moved away from Mme de La Vallière! And now the converted sinner was one of their sisters, one of their mothers, at once their solace and their pattern.

For the rest, Sister Louise was less and less visited during these closing years of her life. Time was doing his work, was removing curiosity—and those who could feel curiosity. At the Carmelites, though they avoid the living, they pray for them as well as for the dead. How many dead already figured in our recluse's prayers! Many of her friends and companions had gone before she had retired at all; and, since her profession, she had seen her brother, her son, her son-in-law, her mother—all depart. Later, among her friends, Colbert and Queen Marie-Thérèse. In 1700, more gaps were made. Of the three young Princesses of Orleans, her friends of the Blois days, one only survived, the Princess of Tuscany, who had been immured successively in the Abbey of Montmartre and in the Convents of Picpus and Saint-Mandé, who lived obscurely despite her lineage, unloved despite her kindness, giving much yet looked upon as miserly, behaving soberly—yet watched, at fifty, as if she were a disreputable woman! "Cousin Charles," Duc de Lorraine, had died a soldier's death. As to Made-

moiselle, La Grande Mademoiselle, *she* had died without ever having known happiness, a soured creature, detesting Lauzun—Lauzun, who had never loved her. Of the superb Mancini girls, two, Hortense and Marie-Anne, whose fortunes were as unlike as their characters, had yet ended by dying in the same exile. Marie, the Constableness, was reduced to beggary.

Pitiless Time had mown down impartially friends and foes, good hearts and bad hearts—old Saint-Aignan and Roquelaure, Bellefonds and Rancé. . .

Who, then, were left of all the young people of 1661 ? Du Fouilloux, the maid-of-honour, with 150,000 *livres* for her perquisite—now Comtesse d'Alluye, but poor and shabby, breakfasting from the ham-and-beef shop (so a contemporary tells us) and cadging for a decent dinner among her old acquaintances ; the d'Artigny girl, now Comtesse du Roure, the Mancini, Comtesse de Soissons—both of them tagged with a tale of poisons ! Then Mme de Montespan, willing at last to be virtuous, and Mme de Maintenon, from the first resigned to that rôle ; and finally, Louis, Louis the God-given, now proclaimed as Louis the Great. Very great he truly was in many respects, but weak enough not to have carried proudly his widowhood of the noblest of women—and now living, in the great French Court, like any rich old bachelor “ caught ” by his children's governess, and forcing her upon his friends, his heirs, his neighbours ! Sister Louise might have counted *that* as another death.

The cloister itself could have taught her the old lesson of the shortness of life and the passing away of all things. The community was almost entirely changed since she had been a postulant in 1674. Fifty nuns had received her, and thirty-four of them were dead before the end of 1700. By that time, the gaps in her former circle—the worldly circle—were quite innumerable.

Louise saw the decadence of the great reign, which had begun so gloriously—which finished amid so many humiliations. That Oratory of the Carmelites which she had so loved to deck out, she despoiled with her own hands ; from that fair Chapel, she and her Sisters took down eagerly the decorations of gold and of silver, so that they might send them to the Treasury of the King, and thus contribute to the defence of their country. Truly she might cry, with Bossuet (now also in his grave), "What a state—and what a state !" The young slim girl who danced so gracefully, the Duchess whose beauty still struck the crowd as she wended her way to the Carmelites, and impressed the illustrious company assembled to see her take the veil, "little La Vallière," the Duchesse de Vaujours, Sister Louise de la Miséricorde—was now more than sixty years old. She was very infirm. Habitual headache, sciatica, terrible rheumatism in every limb—all these tried her endurance. Her constitution was shattered, and she suffered too from a painful internal disorder. A phrase of her Prioress admirably depicts her, now so wracked with suffering ; "She shows only the pain she *cannot* conceal."

When they begged her to take some rest : "There is no more rest for me on earth," she answered. And there was never a murmur—or, if there were, it was for her long exile here below. Still, urged by the anxious Sisters, and ever obedient, she did consent to take some thought for herself—but it came too late. Her sufferings increased. She exulted in them. A nun once expressed grief at seeing her in such a state, and the sick woman, utterly exhausted, raised her hands and eyes to heaven, and answered only in the words of the Psalm : "*Virga tua et baculus tuus ipsa me consolata sunt*"—thanking God that He permitted her to do penance. In former days, she

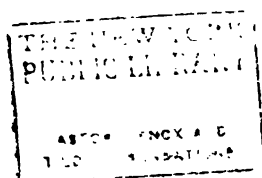


Louise Françoise de la Beurnie, le Blanc Duchesse de la Vallière, Religieuse Carmélite sous le nom de S^r Louise de la miséricorde, elle prit l'habit le 21 Juin 1679, fit profession le 6^e Juin 1679, et décéda le 6^e Juin 1719, âgée de 40 ans. Elle s'appliquoit aux pratiques de la piété et de la pénitence par l'exemple de son frere prodigue, et sur une image qu'elle en avoit dans son bréviaire, elle avoit écrit: L'eau de nos larmes, Seigneur, dissipe le feu de votre colère, et les ames qui après avoir eu le malheur de vous perdre, reçoivent la grace de retourner à vous, au lieu d'y rencontrer la rigueur d'un juge sévère, y trouvent la tendresse d'un pere charitable.

Dans les dernières années de la vie
de la sœur Louise de la Miséricorde,
ses supérieurs ecclésiastiques lui ont
fait souffrir des peines considérables
en la priant de lire des livres pieux
où elle trouvoit ~~aucunes~~ consolations.

After the Obituary at Port-Royal.

SISTER LOUISE DE LA MISÉRICORDE ON HER DEATH-BED.



had obtained permission to rise two hours before the rest of the community. On the day before her death she tried, at three o'clock in the morning, to perform her usual devotions ; but the pain was too much for even *her* courage, and she could not reach the choir. Unable to proceed, she leaned against the wall, speechless with agony. Two hours later, a nun found her there, and hastened to tell the nursing-sister. They had to carry Louise away. Despite her illness, she would not have her serge garments changed for linen. The doctors, hurriedly summoned, had her bled, but they saw immediately that all was in vain.

The Carmelites consider it necessary to warn invalids of their danger ; but it was not necessary to warn Louise. She knew her last hour was come, and joyfully welcomed death. Acute inflammation aggravated her pain ; she merely repeated : "It is fitting that a sinner should die in desperate agony." On the following night, growing weaker and weaker, she asked for the Last Sacraments. It was June 6. In that sweet month, she had once made her *début* at Court ; in it too, at Fontainebleau, she had inspired and yielded to that long-expiated passion. But in the supreme hour, her thoughts went no further back than to the beginning of her second life, and she said to the Sisters : "God has done *all* for me ; in this season He once received from me the sacrifice of my Profession ; and I hope that He will also receive the sacrifice of well-merited suffering which I am ready to offer Him." She confessed, communicated—and they thought that the anguish had ceased for a while. But almost instantly a great weakness came over her, and they were obliged to recall the Abbé Pirot. He administered Extreme Unction, and she was quite conscious while she received it. It was then eleven o'clock in the morning. At this moment the Princesse de Conti, who had been summoned, arrived,

but the dying woman could no longer articulate. By tender looks and holy gestures, she conveyed all her desires for that dear daughter. She preserved this lucidity of mind to the end. The venerable Abbé Pirot, seeing her suffering, suggested this prayer : "Lord, if you increase my anguish, increase my patience also"—and she, unable to speak, showed by signs that she was offering it silently. At last, God put an end to her pain. She died at midday, aged sixty-five years and ten months, after thirty-six years of the religious life, "leaving the community as distressed by her death as it was edified by her repentance."

The news of her death spread quickly. It was the custom to place the bodies of deceased Carmelite nuns near the railing of the choir, for a sort of lying-in-state. When Sister Louise's body was so displayed, there was such an extraordinary concourse of all sorts of persons that the *grille* had to be left open from the morning until half-past five in the evening ; and during that time four nuns had all they could do to receive and give back the reliquaries, medals, books, images, which were passed to them so that they might touch the holy remains of the penitent. "And at last, when the ecclesiastics entered for the burying, there broke forth all over the church a confused clamour of voices, which, so to speak, canonised her in advance, imploring with confident and pious zeal the intercession of a soul which was regarded as consummated in the Infinite Sanctity of God." The nuns, more measured in their sentiment, when writing their customary circular-letter, merely said : "We ask the usual suffrages of the Order for our much-honoured Sister Louise de la Miséricorde, professed nun of this Convent, whom an illness of thirty hours has just removed from our midst." The

whole Carmelite spirit is in those words, "an illness of thirty hours"! The Prioress reckoned as nothing thirty-six years of austerities, of fasts, of voluntary sufferings.

When they told the King of Louise de La Vallière's death, he did not seem touched. He had lost even that faculty of weeping which had formerly given him an appearance of sensibility. To account for his indifference, he thought it necessary to say that from the day Louise had given herself to God, she was dead to him. Men are like that. He was pleased to forget the eight years of desertion, humiliation, and disgust inflicted on the unhappy woman before he permitted her to retire to a Convent.

Popular imagination represents Sister Louise as having been buried with a ring on her finger—the ring given by the only man she had ever loved. It is utterly false. Moreover, Sister Louise de la Miséricorde would not have kept a ring which Louise de La Vallière had never had the right to wear. They buried her as all her Sisters in religion are buried; and, obeying the usages of the Order, a little stone, bearing only her religious name and the date of her death, was placed above the mound which covered her. Alas! even the deepest humility is no safeguard against the basest outrage: those impious hands which violated the pompous tombs of Saint-Denis, did not spare the modest head-stones of the Carmelites—and the same Revolutionary tempest swept away, and perhaps commingled, the ashes of Louis the Great and of Louise de La Vallière.



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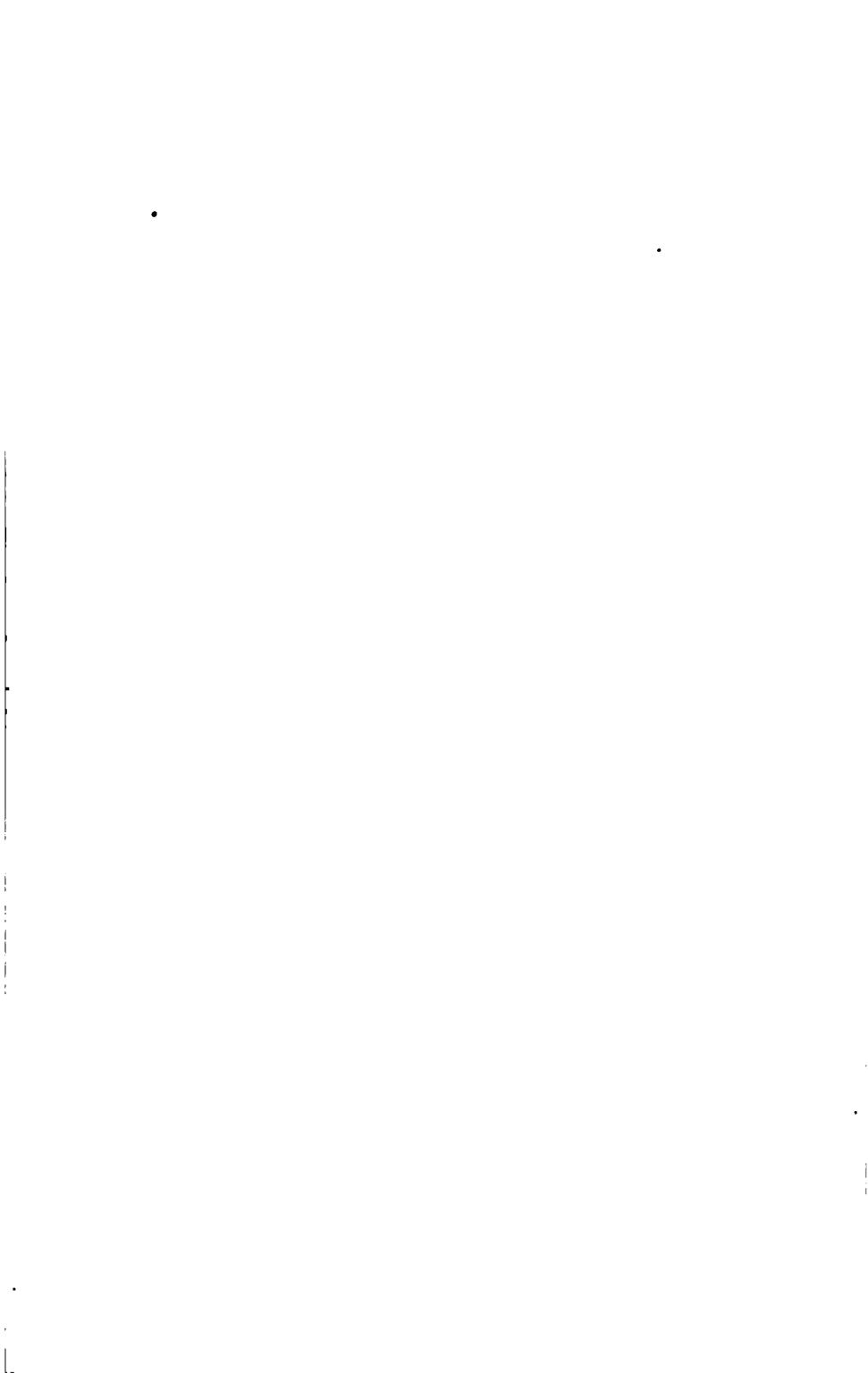
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